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The Public Reading Career of Agnes Moorehead: An Investigation of Her Theory and Practice.

Orville Leon Perkins

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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**The public reading career of Agnes Moorehead: An
investigation of her theory and practice**

Perkins, Orville Leon, Ph.D.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1987

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THE PUBLIC READING CAREER OF AGNES MOOREHEAD:
AN INVESTIGATION
OF HER THEORY AND PRACTICE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State
University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Speech Communication, Theatre,
and Communication Disorders

by

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ABSTRACT

Agnes Moorehead worked as a professional actress for forty-five years. She was employed in all the major entertainment fields of her time--theatre, vaudeville, radio, film, television and the recording industry. A significant reason for this almost constant employment was Moorehead's career as a public reader of literature.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, it seeks to document Moorehead's public reading career with emphasis upon her solo performances of literature and in so doing to provide an investigation of those people and events that most influenced her success as an oral reader.

The second purpose is to postulate Moorehead's theory of performance. It is hypothesized that any actor develops a personal theory of performance whether or not this theory has been formulated either consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, it is reasoned that Moorehead's theory of performance can be discovered by examining her practice and her comments about performance.

Chapter I provides a biographical sketch of Moorehead's life. Chapter II contains a history of Moorehead's participation as both actress and director in three separate productions of George Bernard Shaw's Don Juan In Hell; attention is especially given to the first of these

productions, directed by Charles Laughton and produced by Paul Gregory.

Chapter III is a discussion of Moorehead's one-woman program of readings, That Fabulous Redhead, produced by Laughton and Gregory, and a description of its conception, staging, touring history and subsequent developments. Chapter IV is an examination of Moorehead's theory of performance based upon her practice and her comments about performance. The Appendix to the study contains a copy of Moorehead's original script for her solo program.

Moorehead was a success as an oral performer of literature. The longevity of her career supports this conclusion. Moorehead's reading career was largely influenced by the theories and practices of Laughton and Gregory. Her theory was also in agreement with those theories of performance advocated by the authors of major college textbooks on interpretation during the period of her performance career. Similarly, her practice was in harmony with the practice of other important oral performers of the period.

Introduction

Agnes Moorehead worked as a professional actress from 1929 until her death in 1974. She was employed in all the major entertainment fields of her time--theatre, vaudeville, radio, film, television and the recording industry. She was a dedicated, indefatigable performer who often began rehearsals for a new production before completing the terms of a then current engagement. Although known primarily as a versatile character actress, Moorehead was both a singer and a dancer, and she appeared in several musicals on the stage and in films.

Moorehead's professionalism as an actress was based upon her commitment to performance, a commitment that was limitless. She often repeated the thought (at times variously expressed) that an actor who was not working was a dead actor. It is to her credit that Moorehead was rarely unemployed. A significant reason for this almost constant employment was Moorehead's career as a public reader of literature.

The oral performance of literature attained a renewed popularity among the general public as a professional art form during the years following the Second World War. Much of the credit for this popularity must be given to the team

of Charles Laughton and Paul Gregory, entrepreneurs who revitalized an ancient art form through a combination of ingenious artistry and creative salesmanship.

Laughton and Gregory believed that the American public was not the mentally lazy ogre that social critics thought it to be. It was their philosophy that "a vast, neglected audience in America. . . was ready to listen to the finest literature in very large quantities."¹ Laughton and Gregory produced four original oral performance productions that crisscrossed the United States, playing to audiences in everything from modern theatres to high school gymnasiums.

Two of their productions featured Miss Moorehead. She appeared as the only female member of the First Drama Quartet in Laughton and Gregory's Don Juan In Hell, a milestone production in the history of oral performance of literature in the twentieth century. Moorehead also appeared in the one-woman show That Fabulous Redhead, which Laughton and Gregory conceived and designed specially for her. Laughton and Gregory were two of the most influential men in Moorehead's professional life, and it was through their efforts that she was able "to bring the essence of good theatre into the smaller towns and cities of America."²

From 1951 until the time of her death, few years went by that did not contain a public reading engagement for Miss Moorehead. She is primarily associated with group performance of literature by students within the discipline of oral interpretation. Nonetheless, Moorehead was also in

demand as a solo performer and only a small portion of her public reading engagements were spent as a performer within a group of readers.

Although Moorehead appeared in the original as well as the revival of Don Juan In Hell and also toured with her one-woman show for almost two decades, a review of Dissertation Abstracts, the Index to Studies in the Oral Interpretation of Literature and its supplement, and the Louisiana State University Library's computer assisted search service produces no evidence of any existing study on the professional career of Agnes Moorehead as either an actress or as a public reader. The lack of information about a master professional performer of literature has prompted the present study.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, this study seeks to document the public reading of Agnes Moorehead with emphasis upon her career as a solo performer of literature and in doing so, to provide an investigation of those people and events that most influenced her success as an oral reader.

The second purpose is to postulate for the reader Moorehead's theory of performance. It is hypothesized that any actor of Moorehead's calibre, who spent over forty years as a professional artist in the theatre, develops a personal theory of performance whether or not this theory has been formulated either consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, it is reasoned that Moorehead's theory of performance can be

discovered by examining her practice and her comments about performance.

Research on the life and professional acting career of Agnes Moorehead provides a number of contributing studies that present significant information about her career as a public performer of literature. Warren Sherk's Agnes Moorehead: A Very Private Person (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Co., 1976) is a valuable resource for any study undertaken of Moorehead, her life, and her career. Although it contains interviews with many artists who knew Moorehead and worked with her as well as documentation of her professional life, Sherk's biography is written in the form of a memoir, and the author describes his biography as "selective"; it is not a definitive work.

Good Dames (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1974), by James Robert Parish, includes an extensive chapter on Moorehead. In this chapter Parish offers biographical information, a brief history of Moorehead's professional achievements, and a complete filmography. The filmography is helpful source for establishing chronology of Moorehead's readings when used in conjunction with secondary resource materials.

Hollywood Speaks: An Oral History (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), by Mike Steen, contains a lengthy interview with Moorehead under the Chapter entitled "Character Actress." In this interview Moorehead discusses her life as a young girl and her desire to be an actress.

She also describes her education and professional schooling. Moorehead expresses her beliefs about the nature of, and commitment to, the art of acting in the later portions of this interview.

Moorehead's own writings are limited in number, but the following list of articles proves helpful in defining the dimensions of her life and work. Moorehead's "Staging Don Juan In Hell," Western Speech Journal, 18, (May, 1954), 163-166, presents her impressions of the original production of this program. Her "Special Air Surrounds an Actress," (Los Angeles Times, 19 July 1965) contains comments about the artist's need to separate, and thereby protect, her private life from her professional life. In "My Favorite Script," (Guideposts, August, 1965, pp. 8-10), Moorehead writes about her early life and her struggle to enter show business and about her personal religious beliefs. Moorehead addresses the subject of professional discipline and the need to be selective in choosing roles in "Acting is Only One Part Magic," Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, 10 August 1970.

The influence of Charles Laughton and Paul Gregory upon Moorehead's reading career as well as upon her theory of performance is immense. Individual studies of these men, their careers, and their concepts of performing literature, provide additional reference materials for this study. These works include two biographies of Laughton: The Laughton Story: An Intimate Story of Charles Laughton by Kurt Singer (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1954) and Charles

Higham's Charles Laughton: An Intimate Biography (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1976).

Other works concerned with Laughton's theories of performance include Laughton's How to Tell a Story (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957), in which he describes for the neophyte reader a six-point program for reading aloud. Published articles that examine Laughton's theories are Lionel Crocker's "Charles Laughton on Oral Reading," Central States Speech Journal, 3 (December, 1951), 21-26; and James E. Lennon and William W. Hamilton's "Charles Laughton's Interpretative Reading," (Speech Teacher 4, March, 1955, 87-88); and Daniel Kasle's "Charles Laughton's Techniques of Oral Interpretation," (unpublished MA thesis, Indiana University, 1969).

Only one completed study of Paul Gregory exists, James Lester Johnson's The Art of Paul Gregory: An Examination of Gregory's Historic, Aesthetic and Pedagogic Contributions to Interpretation and Theatre (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1981). In this study Johnson traces the development of Gregory's producing career and his theories of staging reading programs. Gregory labels his theory "Perception Dynamics." It is interesting to note that Johnson mentions Moorehead in relationship to Don Juan In Hell and to The Rivalry, one an oral reading and the other a docudrama, both of which Gregory produced. However, Johnson makes no mention of Moorehead's solo reading programs, which Gregory also produced.

Eugene Bahn and Margaret L. Bahn's A History of Oral Interpretation (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Co., 1970), a survey of oral performance and interpretation theory from the beginning of recorded history to the present, offers an interview of the history of oral interpretation in the twentieth century. Histories of professional oral interpretation programs provide more particularized information about the era in which Moorehead read. These include Jack Winfred Smith's "A Study of Selected Professional Reading Programs in the United States, 1950-1960" (unpublished MA thesis, Texas Christian University, 1966) and A. J. Jaswal's "Oral Interpretation as a Form of Professional Theatre on the New York Stage from 1945 to 1965" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1968). All of the works mentioned above refer to Moorehead and Don Juan In Hell.

In addition to the studies already cited, there exist a number of collections of Moorehead memorabilia. The most extensive collection of materials on or about Moorehead is housed at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. The materials in this collection were willed to the University of Wisconsin, which Moorehead attended, and were deposited by the University in the State Historical Society's archives. The collection, containing all of Moorehead's personal and theatrical memorabilia, is comprised of sixty-five boxes and one hundred four scrapbooks. In it are included scripts of

programs, correspondence, Moorehead Fan Club materials, and press kits for her reading tours.

Other collections on or about Moorehead are found in New York Public Library and in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS). The New York Public Library holds clippings of studio biographies that provide details of Moorehead's career in motion pictures plus comments by Moorehead about her reading engagements and about her artistic concepts and beliefs. All of the materials in these collections are available for duplication and have been received from the organizations.

The researcher has been led to reviews of Moorehead's readings through documentation provided in the contributing studies. These reviews are from newspapers in cities and towns throughout America and from college and university newspapers. These materials are available for duplication from their publishers.

This study is not intended as a comprehensive examination of Moorehead's professional career in show business. It is limited to a study of her career as an oral performer of literature, and special emphasis is given to her appearances in Don Juan In Hell and That Fabulous Redhead (later called Come Closer, I'll Give You an Earful). The intent of this study is not to draw new aesthetic principles but rather to illustrate how Moorehead's theory

and practice support or reject the theories of oral interpretation of her time.

This study presents a brief history of Moorehead's life and career in several media. It also presents a history of her reading career as well as an examination of the people and events which most influenced her reading career. It provides descriptions of her reading performances and a discussion of her theory of performance based upon her practice and upon her comments about performance.

Endnotes

¹James Lester Johnson, The Art of Paul Gregory: An Examination of Gregory's Historic, Aesthetic and Pedagogic Contributions to Interpretation and Theatre, Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1981, p. 3.

²Louise Falk, "Moorehead Vitality Impresses Ruston Audience," Ruston (LA) Daily Leader, 3 March 1954, p. 6.

Chapter I

Agnes Moorehead: A Biographical Sketch and Brief History of Her Professional Career

Early Years

Agnes Robertson Moorehead was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on 6 December 1906.¹ She was the only child of the Reverend John Henderson Moorehead of the United Presbyterian Church and his wife, Mary Mildred MacCauley. The family lived in Clinton, Massachusetts, until Moorehead was three years old. In 1909, the Mooreheads moved to St. Louis, Missouri, when Mr. Moorehead accepted an invitation to pastor a church in that community.

Moorehead had a deep love and great respect for her father. It was from him that she learned "of the happiness of being with people."² Mr. Moorehead instilled within his daughter an abiding religious fervor that was to remain constant throughout her life. It was her father who first taught her the power of the spoken word and the beauty of vocal expressiveness. A year before her death, Moorehead told reporter William A. Raidy that she still remembered her father "in his pulpit, very dramatic with a full resonant

voice."³ It was in her early years that Moorehead developed into an avid reader. This habit she learned from her father, who encouraged the practice of reading by reading aloud to her from the works of Dickens and Shakespeare.⁴

Moorehead also received encouragement from her father to discover the world in which she lived and the people who lived in it with her. She once told an interviewer: "I used to come home after school with great tales about people I saw in the street. I'd tell my father and he'd say, 'Yes, and then what did they do?'"⁵ Mr. Moorehead continued to encourage his daughter even when her tales passed the bounds of reality into the realm of fantasy and make-believe, and later Moorehead would recall with affection that her father "never stopped me."⁶

Moorehead received from her mother the same warm affection and understanding that she received from her father. Mrs. Moorehead, an accomplished cellist, would in later years remind her grown daughter how as a small girl "she was constantly pretending to be someone else."⁷ One of Moorehead's favorite stories about her mother was the time Mrs. Moorehead found her "crying in a corner because [she] had read The Poor Little Match Girl and was pretending to be cold and hungry too."⁸

When Moorehead was in her teens, she developed into a devoted fan of the English actress Dame Ellen Terry, whom she "idolized." Moorehead wrote a letter to the then retired actress expressing her admiration and sharing her dream of

one day becoming a professional actress. Dame Ellen wrote back encouragingly and also sent an autographed picture. Moorehead never forgot this incident and a year before her death commented that "Her [Terry's] thoughtfulness added to my incentive to go on the stage."⁹

Moorehead seemed to be one of those fortunate people who are born with a sense of purpose. Unlike some, she made a career decision early in life. She was determined to be a performer: "It was always a goal, an [sic] ambition, a desire, to enter the theatre. I never had to find myself, the way so many people do. I always knew what I wanted and where I wanted to go."¹⁰

The Reverend Mr. and Mrs. Moorehead had hoped that their daughter would attend college and prepare for a career in teaching. However, Moorehead's dreams of the stage, though they were never encouraged by her parents, were never discouraged either. When Moorehead was just beginning to achieve success on the radio, a reporter asked Mrs. Moorehead what she thought of having a daughter in show business. Mrs. Moorehead replied: "We did not object to her going in for dramatics. . . . The fact is she was so determined that our objections, had there been any, would have availed little."¹¹ Moorehead's parents did insist nonetheless that their daughter earn a college degree. It was the only demand they ever made of her except that she not work on Sundays.

Moorehead received her primary and secondary education in the public schools of St. Louis. Along with the required

courses she had to take to graduate, Moorehead added classes in public speaking and oratory and participated in any event "that involved a stage."¹²

Moorehead began dancing classes while still in primary school, and at the age of ten without the knowledge and consent of her parents she auditioned for, and was accepted into, the corps de ballet of the St. Louis Municipal Opera. To win her admittance into the corps, Moorehead lied about her age and refused "to be shaken from (her) story of being 16 years old."¹³ Moorehead's first role with the company was that of a "Nubian slave" who acted as fan bearer to the queen in Aida. During the four years that she spent with the opera, she appeared in other operatic productions as well as in musical comedies such as Rio Rita and in "the whole run of operettas so popular then including Gilbert and Sullivan" and works by Herbert, Friml, and Lehar.¹⁴

Moorehead always referred to this initial experience in the theatre as the beginning of her professional career. Although she never suggested that she had been paid for her appearances, the rewards Moorehead gained from her association with the St. Louis Municipal Opera were significant. First, it provided a valuable training experience that was to stand her in good stead later in life. Second, it made available other opportunities to perform. The girls of the corps were often used as "extras and walk-ons" at the Forest Park Stock Company.¹⁵ Also, at the age of twelve, Moorehead was invited to sing on the radio by

station KMOX, where she was billed as "the girl baritone."¹⁶ Third, and most important, it was a benefit to her developing personality that the respect and approval she won from other members of the company for her talent and discipline further strengthened her resolve to succeed in an acting career.

Education

After she was graduated from high school, Moorehead's association with the Municipal Opera ended. She entered Muskingum College in New Concord, Ohio, in 1919. Her father had attended Muskingum College before he entered the seminary, and Moorehead's paternal grandparents lived not far from New Concord. Moorehead majored in biology. James Robert Parish in Good Dames suggests that her choice of majors was dictated by her need to demonstrate "her intellectual nature."¹⁷ Moorehead's studies did not restrain her from joining the college drama club. "She was Toinon Chepy in Louis N. Parker's The Aristocrat her junior year and played Margaret Lightfoot in Paul Kestler's historical drama Friend Hannah in her senior year."¹⁸ She was also active in the college glee club and was a member of Delta Gamma Sorority.

Moorehead received her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1923 but remained in Muskingum for an additional year to take post graduate courses in speech, English, and education. In 1924, she moved to Wisconsin, where her parents were living, since

her father's ministry had taken him to Reedsberg, Wisconsin. Moorehead often stated in interviews that she had studied towards an "advanced degree" at the University of Wisconsin. This degree is listed as a Master of Arts degree in most biographical references. However, Herb Evert at the registrar's office of the University of Wisconsin could find no record to confirm that Moorehead was granted a masters degree. Her advanced work consisted of six credits toward a certificate for teacher-librarian, which Moorehead completed during the summer months of 1924 at the Wisconsin Library School of the University. There is no record that Moorehead completed the program.¹⁹

Moorehead's first paying job as an adult was a teacher at Central High School in Soldiers Grove, Wisconsin, where she taught English and Latin. Her teaching duties included coaching the members of the speech club and directing the student plays. It was while she was teaching that Moorehead began to save the money to finance her dream of attending the American Academy of Dramatic Arts (AADA)²⁰ in New York. The tuition was \$500 per year for a two years course of study at the AADA. She had saved enough by 1927, and in that year she auditioned and was accepted as a student by the Academy.

The head of the AADA during the years that Moorehead attended the school was Mr. Charles Jehlenger, and it was for him that she auditioned. Jehlenger wrote on her audition report that she had a dramatic instinct and a good voice, and that she was a very intelligent reader.²¹ Moorehead in later

years explained that Jehlinger did not encourage her to enroll in the AADA program:

He said to me, "You don't need to come to this school. You've had a lot of training. Go out and get a job." I thought he didn't want me!. I thought, "Oh, I can't stand it. I'm not very good." Tears began rolling down my cheeks, and he said, "Well, if that's the way you feel, we'd love to have you, but you don't have to have us." 22

Moorehead spent two years at the AADA. To her classmates she was known as Bobby, a pet form of her middle name. She took acting as well as courses in voice, theatre history, stage mechanics (i.e. stage movement) and make-up.²³ She also continued to teach part-time at the Dalton School to help support herself.²⁴ She was allowed to pass on to the second year of study at the end of 1928. The promotion had to be recommended by the faculty in Moorehead's case as in the case of all students of the Academy and was not an automatic procedure.

During her second year Moorehead appeared in a number of school plays, including The Springboard by Alice Duer Miller, Captain Applejack by Walter Hackett, and The Last of Mrs. Cheyney by Fred Lansdale.²⁵ She was graduated in 1929 after the end of the second year. Her fellow graduates included Rosalind Russell and Jack Griffiths Lee. Lee was later Moorehead's first husband, whom she married in 1930.

Early Professional Life

Moorehead was faced with the problem of finding work in the professional theatre after the completion of her studies. It was not an easy matter for her to find engagements and she, like so many other struggling actors, was often short of money. She once lived on rolled oats for a period of two weeks because she had no money to buy food. She did of course take an occasional non-acting job to make ends meet. However, she was still determined to make it in the profession, and her days were primarily spent in "pounding the pavement" as she visited the offices of agents, casting directors and producers. The depression was at its peak, and Moorehead survived on faith in God and in herself.²⁶

Moorehead's early stage work began soon after she left the AADA. In her resume, she listed six productions with which she was associated during the period of 1929-1934. A review of the cast lists for these productions published in the Best Plays series does not reveal that she was a member of any of the opening night ensembles. This early work, in fact, consisted of understudy assignments and supernumerary roles.²⁷ For some of these shows Moorehead toured in "second or third companies," that is, companies formed after the national tours of the original productions. These included the Theatre Guild's production of Eugene O'Neill's Marco Millions. Her first appearance on the Broadway stage was in the play Soldiers and Women (Ritz Theatre, 2 September 1929) by Paul Harvey Fox and George Tilton. Moorehead received the understudy assignment for the part of a Hindu princess by

"pestering" the producer Al Wood until he relented.²⁸ One week after the opening *Sarat Lahiri*, who was portraying the character, was ill and Moorehead took over the part.

It was not until Moorehead had achieved success on the radio and in motion pictures that her major stage work was done. However, during this early period as a struggling actress she made a decision to concentrate on character parts: "When I entered the theatre, I became wholeheartedly a character performer. To me, character people are the actors."²⁹ One of her biographers, James Robert Parish, suggests that this decision was based on an assessment of her physical looks, which Moorehead knew were not suitable for conventional ingenue roles.³⁰

Radio Career

It was at the beginning of the new decade of the thirties that Moorehead's acting career began in earnest. This career was not in the live theatre, of which she had fantasized as a child, but in the essentially new medium of the radio. Radio was indeed the springboard for all of her later successes. During the 1930's Moorehead worked constantly on various radio serials and by the 1950's proudly stated that she had appeared on over 11,500 separate live radio broadcasts.³¹

From 1930 until 1949, the year that her last serial ended, Moorehead was in demand as a radio actress. Her

physical appearance was not a factor; this demand was based upon her wide-ranging vocal ability. She explained that she was a "mistress of a whole Pandora's box of voices, each one completely different."³² Her ability to create many voices allowed Moorehead to appear "in as many as six radio shows a day at the top of her radio career."³³

Moorehead entered radio in 1930. Her radio career was as an actress on serials and soap operas. Her first assignment was given to her by Joseph Beel, a radio executive who had been one of her teachers at the AADA. Beel offered her the role of Sally on National Broadcasting Company's (NBC) The Mystery House. This was Moorehead's first serial. She was to appear in twenty-five serials in all.³⁴ Her serial roles included Mrs. Van Alastaire Crowder on The New Penny with Helen Hayes, Rosie on Dot and Will, the original Dragon Lady on Terry and The Pirates, and the title role of Joyce Jordan, Girl Intern.

Moorehead also played the stooge for many famous comedians. She was on the first broadcast of The Jack Benny Show. She also played the foil for Bert Lahr, Fred Allen, Bob Hope and Ed Wynn.³⁵ In 1933, Moorehead worked for comedian Phil Baker, playing the role of Mrs. Sarah Heartburn on his radio program. She and Baker toured the vaudeville circuits between 1933 and 1936 with an act entitled Baker, Bottle and Beetle.

Moorehead played many various types of roles on the radio. Most often, however, she was cast as a zany, fickle

woman or as a sharp-tongued shrew. She portrayed the part of Nana on Evening in Paris, whom she later described as "the most fluttery helpless little half-wit who ever lived."³⁶ In contrast, on The Seth Parker Show, she played the role of Lizzie, whose tart replies could blister the paint off a house. The extent of her ability in range was perhaps most evident in the serial The Lady Next Door. On this show Moorehead played the role of Jeanne, a sweet-tempered girl, as well as the role of Betty, a conniving harpie.

It was for the radio program Suspense, another anthology series, that Moorehead created her most memorable radio performance. The year was 1943 and the script by Lucille Fletcher was entitled Sorry, Wrong Number. Moorehead played the role of Mrs. Stevenson, a bedridden invalid, who overhears a telephone conversation between two murderers when the wires become crossed. In her attempt to find help for the woman who is the intended victim, Mrs. Stevenson meets with nothing but resistance from the telephone company and the police. It is, of course, Mrs. Stevenson who is the victim. The part required Moorehead to move through the emotions of frustration to annoyance and anger to abject terror.

About the role of Mrs. Stevenson, Moorehead commented: "It is the power of the unseen that is so overwhelming. . . . The radio play is structured so that you become as confined as the woman. It is impossible for you to leave the bedroom,

and finally the killer is coming for the listener as well as Mrs. Stevenson."³⁷

Variety reported that Sorry, Wrong Number was Moorehead's "best-remembered role."³⁸ Critic John Stanley, writing about Moorehead after her death, deemed Sorry, Wrong Number "dramatic radio's finest moment" and Moorehead "radio's finest dramatic star."³⁹

When Moorehead began her motion picture career in the early 1940's, her radio commitments declined. However, she always specified in her film contracts that she be allowed to accept radio assignments. From 1943 until 1949, Moorehead appeared on the radio as Marilly on Mayor of Our Town with Lionel Barrymore. This was the last series in which she performed as a regular cast member, and during this time she was under contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer as well.

She found radio to be a stimulant to the imagination for both the actor and the listener. This was so, she believed, because of the non-visual aspect of radio that required the actor to develop characterization through the voice alone.⁴⁰ Furthermore, radio "appealed to the imagination. It demanded of the player a more psychological detail. . . ." ⁴¹ The listener created "fantasies" from these vocal characterizations. Moorehead in later years contrasted radio with television, a medium in which she also worked, and found radio to be by far the better of the two because of this stimulus to the imagination. Television asks that the viewer only "just sit there like a lump."⁴²

Association with Orson Welles

It was during the middle 1930's while working on a soap opera, that Moorehead first met a man who was to play a pivotal role in the development of her career. His name was Orson Welles. They had both been working in radio for some time when fate brought them together. In 1935, they were signed to appear together on March of Time. This NBC program was a series of dramatic re-enactments of major news events. Welles was the narrator for the series and Moorehead along with actress Jeanette Nolan portrayed all of the female roles. Moorehead considered this program a valuable training experience for her as an actress. She played all types of women from "living queens, president's wives, empresses and axe murderesses."⁴³ One of her parts was that of Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt complimented Moorehead personally on the portrayal, telling her that she could not believe that it was not her (Roosevelt's) own voice.⁴⁴ Moorehead and Welles also worked together on The Shadow. They originated the roles of Lamont Cranston, The Shadow; and Margot Lane, his secretary.

When Welles was asked by the Dupont Company to produce a program for them, he hired Moorehead to play several leading women for the series Cavalcade of America. This show was similar in concept to March of Time except that the stories were not limited to current news events. Moorehead portrayed

such women as Ann Hutchinson and Josephine Baker (Typhoid Mary). She had a great success as Marie Dressler, the actress. About this performance Variety wrote: "In the 'ugly duckling' leading role, Agnes Moorehead turned in a superb performance, steadily changing from a diffident, youthful voiced tyro to the celebrated and assured but large-hearted old woman. And her voice sounded quite like Miss Dressler's."⁴⁵

In later press releases, Moorehead often mentioned that she was one of the charter members of the Mercury Theatre, which was produced by Welles. However, research into this claim does not prove it to be valid. There is no evidence that Moorehead ever appeared in any Mercury Theatre stage production. She was a member of the The Mercury Theatre on the Air, a radio program which Welles created. She was assigned many of the female roles in this anthology series. She even appeared as a cast member of the most famous of these programs, an adaptation of H. G. Welles' War of the Worlds. There were no female leads in this production, and Moorehead's contributions consisted of background voices and much screaming.

Motion Picture Career

Moorehead's film career was an outgrowth of her association with Welles on radio. In 1940, Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO) produced Citizen Kane as the first

of a series of three pictures that Welles was to direct for that company. Welles wanted "fresh faces" for this project, and he persuaded RKO to hire most of the players from his radio troupe. The actors that were hired included Moorehead along with Joseph Cotten, George Coulouris, Ruth Warwick and Ray Collins. The film was released in May, 1941. Moorehead played the mother of the title character. She appeared only briefly in the opening sequences of the film. Welles chose her because of her sharp features and her ability to project vocally a rugged woman worn down by the miseries of life.

Moorehead made two other pictures under the direction of Welles. Their second film together was The Magnificent Ambersons. Moorehead portrayed Aunt Fanny. This character was another woman who had been defeated by the circumstances of her life. Her performance was received enthusiastically by the critics, and won her the New York Film Critics' Award for the best actress of 1942. This film also earned her the first of her Oscar nominations for best supporting actress.

Welles' last film for RKO was Journey Into Fear, a mystery film, and Moorehead's role was that of a wife of a French railwayman. After the completion of this motion picture, Welles' contract was not renewed because he angered the management at RKO. He advised Moorehead to remain in Hollywood and predicted that she would make a career for herself there. Moorehead was saddened by the treatment Welles received from RKO and the Hollywood motion picture

industry for his film Citizen Kane, but she took Welles' advice and remained.

She worked with Welles again in several projects in media other than films. Moorehead believed that he was a genius who could inspire her to create characterizations that she could not have created by herself. She once described him as the "most stimulating man" that she had ever met.⁴⁶ It was Welles who talked Moorehead into accepting a seven year contract with MGM and even helped her to negotiate for more money. They remained friends until the end of her life.

Moorehead made over sixty motion pictures during her career in Hollywood. After she separated from Welles, her roles were not as challenging, however. She was "carried away from the intelligentsia stigma of the Broadway-oriented Mercury troupe to the middle-brow-culture of everyday Hollywood filmmaking."⁴⁷ Because of her portrayals of frustrated and/or neurotic women in the films directed by Welles, she was given such roles to enact for MGM. She graduated from this type of role to that of playing mothers. Moorehead played mother to almost every star in Hollywood from John Wayne to James Stewart to Jerry Lewis. She was often younger than the actors who played her children.

Moorehead's performances in films included roles in comedies, dramas and musicals. She played everything from queens and society dowagers to back-woods country women. In The Lost Moment, she portrayed a woman of one hundred and

seven years. This transformation took four hours in the make-up department every morning. Moorehead's personal favorite among her screen appearances was that of the Baroness Aspasia Conti in Mrs. Parkington.⁴⁸ In this film, she played a warm, witty woman of the world who was beautiful and glamorous. It was in direct contrast to the majority of her motion picture assignments.

Moorehead received four Oscar nominations. Besides The Magnificent Ambersons these included Mrs. Parkington, Johnny Belinda and Hush, Hush Sweet Charlotte. All of the nominations were for best supporting actress. Many publicists and newspaper reporters listed five nominations. A nomination for The Magnificent Obsession was often accorded her, but this information is inaccurate. The reasons for these inaccuracies cannot be determined.

Television Career

Moorehead's film career came to a virtual standstill in the early 1960's, when she signed a contract to appear as a regular on the television program, Bewitched. Moorehead had done much television work before this series went into production but had also managed to continue her motion picture career.

Her first television appearance cannot be ascertained, but it is known that she began to work in television in the early 1950's. Television offered her another means of

practicing her craft as well as reaping financial rewards. However, money was not the major reason for any of her appearances in this medium. It seems that she was more interested in the quality of the scripts. Moorehead once remarked, "Some of the things one has say on television no one--Lawrence Olivier included--could do anything good with. Sometimes I shut my eyes and try to work out what is going on just from the words, but it's hopeless, one hasn't a clue."⁴⁹

Moorehead acted on every major television series and a list of those would include well over one hundred items.⁵⁰ Some of the top-rated programs on which she appeared were G. E. Theatre, Playhouse 90, Wagon Train, Suspense, Shirley Temple Storybook and Dupont Show-of-The-Month. One of her most memorable performances was on the series The Twilight Zone, in which she played an old country woman whose house is besieged by "two robot-like miniature men" from outer space. This episode, entitled "The Invaders," was broadcast by Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) on 21 January, 1962. In this thirty minute telecast, Moorehead was the only performer seen on the camera and she spoke not one word of dialogue.

The only program on which she appeared as a regular was the long running Bewitched. She portrayed a witch with supernatural powers who had a daughter who was married to a mortal man. Elizabeth Montgomery played the daughter and Dick York (later Dick Sergeant) played the husband. Moorehead agreed to do the pilot for the series because it "was

charming and had no violence."⁵¹ She was surprised when it was bought by the American Broadcasting Company. She did not originally think that it would be bought, but she had given her word to appear. In her contract, Moorehead made the same stipulations that she made in her motion picture contract in regard to radio appearances. She insisted that she be allowed to accept offers to appear in films. For this reason, Moorehead was under contract to perform in only eight of every thirteen programs produced.

When it was suggested that Bewitched was beneath her, Moorehead answered: "Nonsense . . . comedy has always been my forte."⁵² Nonetheless, she did hold ambivalent feelings about the program. She believed Endora to be mischievous, not hateful, "a devoted mother who shares her values with her daughter and grandchildren."⁵³ "She points out the selfishness and false pride of mankind, and the foibles and failures of mortal man. She can also bring order out of chaos. . . ."⁵⁴ On the other hand, Moorehead did not wish to be remembered as Endora in the minds of the public. She told one interviewer that she had been "quite well known before 'Bewitched' and I don't particularly want to be identified as the witch."⁵⁵

Television was the least admirable of all the media for Moorehead. She saw it as nothing more than a means of selling products. She resented the speed with which it was paced, a speed that demanded too little preparation from the actor and crews. The demands of production schedules did not

afford writers the time to develop scripts of superior worth. For this reason, Moorehead believed that most television scripts were of poor quality, especially those written for television series.

Later Stage Work

In 1950, Moorehead returned to the stage, and between that year and 1974, she appeared in nine separate theatrical productions. The titles of these shows are Don Juan In Hell, That Fabulous Redhead, The Rivalry, The Pink Jungle, Prescription for Murder, Lord Pengo, High Spirits, Don Juan In Hell (1973 revival) and Gigi. These productions consisted of three oral reading programs, one "docudrama," three musicals and two straight plays. All of them, with two exceptions, were taken on major coast-to-coast tours. Moorehead appeared on Broadway in four of the nine.

The first six of these productions were produced by Paul Gregory. Moorehead and Gregory had become associated in 1950 with the production Don Juan In Hell, an extended cutting of the dream sequence from George Bernard Shaw's Man and Superman. They followed this show with an oral reading program in which Moorehead toured as a solo reader. A discussion and examination of Don Juan In Hell is the subject of the next chapter. Moorehead's solo reading career is the topic of chapter three.

The third Moorehead-Gregory production was entitled The

Rivalry, by Norman Corwin; it was based upon the Lincoln-Douglas, debates of 1857. It contained three characters: Lincoln, Douglas, and Mrs. Douglas. The show was presented on an almost bare stage with the cast dressed in period costumes. The Rivalry opened on 23 September 1957 in Vancouver, British Columbia, and toured seventy-two cities throughout North America, playing primarily in college and university theatres.

The cast of characters were Raymond Massey as Lincoln, Martin Gable as Douglas, and Moorehead as Douglas' wife, Adele. In the play Mrs. Douglas functions as the "narrator-character." She is pivotal to the development of the dramatic action. She appears in representational scenes in which she speaks directly to the audience, providing them with narration and commentary.

The Rivalry received good notices for the acting but poor reviews for the script. Moorehead's personal notices were in the main favorable. But most critics agreed that for all her talent and beauty, Moorehead failed to "win out over the elusive thinness of her material."⁵⁶

Moorehead had a featured role in the 1959 production of The Pink Jungle. This musical, produced by Gregory, starred Ginger Rogers. Moorehead's part was that of "the shade of Eleanor West," the deceased head of a cosmetic firm who is given one chance to return to earth to perform one good deed so that she may enter into heaven. The part required Moorehead to take on the various disguises of a police woman,

a waitress and a telephone switchboard operator among half a dozen reincarnations.

The Pink Jungle opened at the Alcazar Theatre in San Francisco on 14 October 1959, and toured the major cities of the United States through the spring of 1960. Gregory had planned to end the tour with a Broadway opening, but the reviews of the play were so negative that he closed the show after its Boston engagement.⁵⁷

Moorehead received exceptionally favorable notices for her performance. The west coast critic for Variety, who reviewed opening night, thought the play "poorly written," but congratulated Moorehead for her "adept, funny performance." He went on to write that Moorehead "comes through with such a sock performance that the show's pallid scripting often can be forgotten. When she's on stage, she gives the show a lift."⁵⁸ Reviews in other papers across the country echoed this praise for Moorehead but consistently held the script to be inferior.

In 1962, Moorehead again took a break from her work in films and television, and returned to the theatre. This time the play was Prescription for Murder by William Link and Richard Levinson. It was a three-act thriller produced by Gregory. It opened in San Francisco on 15 January. Moorehead's character appears in act one only of this three-act murder mystery. She played the wealthy, patrician wife of a psychiatrist (Joseph Cotten) who murders her in order to marry his girlfriend (Patricia Medina) but is

finally caught for the crime by a policeman (Thomas Mitchell).

The play was bound for Broadway after a spring tour through Denver, Topeka, Detroit and Des Moines, among other cities. However, it never reached its goal because of the death of the leading player, Mitchell.

Moorehead opened on Broadway in Lord Pengo at the Royal Theatre on 19 September 1962. This was a drama in which she appeared as Miss Swanson, the secretary to an internationally known art critic, Lord Pengo, played by Charles Boyer. Lord Pengo ran until April, 1963, and received poor notices. This was the last Gregory production in which Moorehead appeared.

Moorehead did not perform in the theatre for another two years after the closing of Lord Pengo. During this period her professional activities were limited to her involvement in Bewitched, though she did make one motion picture, Hush, Hush Sweet Charlotte. She also presented her one-woman show at colleges and universities; these engagements were confined to single bookings, and there were no tours. Her next assignment was that of Madame Arcady in High Spirits at the Music Hall in Dallas, produced for the Dallas Summer Musicals series. This production ran for two weeks from 7 June until 20 June, 1965. It was not a success, and one reviewer cited its poor box office receipts as the contributing factor for the series' financial failure during that season.⁵⁹

Eight years passed before Moorehead again performed on the legitimate stage. She remained busy with her role on

Bewitched and with her occasional reading and lecture engagements during these years. Also, in 1966, Moorehead appeared in the motion picture The Singing Nun with Debbie Reynolds. In 1973, when her series ended, she joined the cast of the revival of Don Juan In Hell. This production of the same reading that she had performed twenty years before was directed by John Houseman. It too will be discussed in the following chapter.

Moorehead ended her stage career with the 1973 production of the musical Gigi. This play was largely based upon the motion picture version of the story with added songs by Frederick Lerner and Alan Jay Lowe. Moorehead appeared as Aunt Alicia. It opened in New York at the Uris Theatre, after a successful pre-Broadway tour, on 13 November 1973. Moorehead became increasingly ill with the cancer that killed her and was forced to leave the show on 24 January 1974.

Other Professional Activities

Along with her other performance activities, Moorehead made several long-playing recordings. Her recordings were for the most part reproductions of works that she had done in other media. For example, she and the other members of The First Drama Quartet recorded Don Juan In Hell, and she also produced a record of her radio triumph Sorry, Wrong Number. Both of these recordings sold extremely well when first released. She did not make a phonographic reproduction of

her one-woman show, but some of the selections from her solo program do appear on recordings of anthologies of readings read by Moorehead as well as other performers.

Moorehead was never able to rid herself of the desire to teach. It was a field to which she returned intermittently throughout the later period of her life. She taught acting and film technique at the University of Southern California during the summer term of 1957. She was also a frequent guest lecturer at colleges and universities. These lectures were often presented in conjunction with performances of her reading program with the lecture presented in the afternoon and the reading at night or one presented on one day and the other on the next.

After a while, Moorehead codified her lecture. Her subject was the nature of the drama and state of the American theatre. One of the special topics that she broached in her lecture was the art of playwriting. The extant copy of this speech provides a distillation of her thoughts about the nature of performance. Moorehead always ended her speech by answering questions from the audience.

Moorehead would also give private instruction to other members of the Hollywood film colony. These pupils included Eva Gabor, Debbie Reynolds and Ava Gardner. She did, however, take on non-professionals as students. She gave private instruction at her home in the summer, but in the winter she taught at her own school in Los Angeles, which she and director Richard Whorf owned and operated. The

school included a staff of five, and enrollment was limited to thirty pupils for each winter term.⁶⁰ Besides instruction in the principles of acting, her school offered courses in voice and diction (Moorehead believed that good speech was the most essential quality that an actor could possess), fencing, and even how to do a "cold" reading.⁶¹

Moorehead was careful to speak only sparingly about her personal life to interviewers. She insisted that it was her duty as an actress to remain aloof and thereby create an air of mystery and glamour about herself. Her reasoning for this stand was her belief that an audience would be sidetracked into thoughts about her life when they encountered her in performance and thereby be led astray from concentrating on the material presented and upon her developed characterization.

Moorehead never expressed a desire to retire from performance. She did own a farm in Ohio that she had inherited from her father, which she would often visit when she was not involved in some project. Moorehead also owned a home in Beverly Hills, which she named Villa Agnese.

Last Illness

Moorehead's last illness forced her to enter the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota shortly after she left the cast of Gigi. She was in and out of the hospital several times during the spring of 1974. She entered the Methodist Hospital in

Rochester, Minnesota, for the last time on 9 April 1974 and died there on 30 April 1974. It was her express wish that the cause of her illness not be revealed. However, Variety's obituary listed the cause of death as cancer of the lungs. The illness was purported to be the result of her work on the motion picture The Conqueror, which had been filmed in Utah in the 1950's near the site of the United States' above-ground testing of atomic bombs. The radioactive particles in the air were said to have caused cancer in forty-six members of the cast and crew of this film. Those who had been involved in this project besides Moorehead who eventually succumbed to the disease included John Wayne, Susan Hayward and Dick Powell, the director.

Moorehead was survived by her mother. She was buried in Dayton, Ohio, next to her father. Her death ended a career that spanned fifty years. Moorehead had worked in every medium available to performers during the years of her life.

Summary

Agnes Moorehead was born into an educated and religious family. Early in her life, she received encouragement to read aloud from her father, who also insisted that she pursue a higher education after high school, an opportunity not open to many young women of her day.

Moorehead attended Muskingum College in Ohio, and was graduated in 1923. She worked as a teacher in Wisconsin for

a few years after completing college. From 1927 until 1929, Moorehead attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, a professional dramatics school in New York City.

After graduating from the Academy, Moorehead found work in the developing medium of live radio during the 1930's. It was as a radio actress that Moorehead first met Orson Welles, one of the three most important men in her professional life. Welles brought Moorehead to Hollywood in the 1940's, where she worked in films and, later, in television.

Moorehead was active as a stage actress from 1950 until the end of her life. Much of her success on stage was influenced by her association with Paul Gregory, the producer of the original Don Juan In Hell as well as Moorehead's original tours of her solo reading program. She appeared in nine stage productions in all between the years 1950 and 1974, the year she died.

Moorehead was active professionally during a period of time when many new forms of communications were developed and refined. She worked in five separate performance media: stage (both legitimate theatre and vaudeville), radio, film, television and recordings. Moorehead was never without a professional engagement from the early 1930's onward except by personal choice. Her career was replicated by only a few of Moorehead's professional contemporaries.

Endnotes

¹This is the date listed in all available biographical sources. However, Dr Donald Hill, Speech Department, Muskingham College, writes that Moorehead's high school record lists the year of her birth "as 1901, a year which makes more sense." Dr. Donald Hill, Department of Speech, Muskingham College, typewritten letter, 4 July 1985.

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³William A. Raidy, "Enthusiasm, Wisdom after 50 years in the Theatre," Corpus Christi (TX) Caller Times, 20 May 1973, n.p.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Roberta Gratz, "The Voice Is Still Bewitching," New York Post, 11 January 1969, n.p.

⁶Ibid.

⁷James Robert Parish, Good Dames, New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1974, p. 78.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Moorehead Memos, No. 5, ed., Roy Buchanan, New Orleans: Moorehead Fan Club, (March 1973), pp. 1-2, in Agnes Moorehead Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹⁰"Agnes Moorehead, Chapter Five," typewritten manuscript in Agnes Moorehead Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI., Box 60, Folder 7, n.d., p.2.

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¹²Op Cit.

¹³Dorothy Manners, "Agnes Moorehead: Hollywood's Party Lady," n.p.

¹⁴"Agnes Moorehead: Chapter Five," p. 3.

¹⁵Parish, Good Dames, pp. 78-79.

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- ¹⁷Parish, Good Dames, p. 79.
- ¹⁸Ibid.
- ¹⁹Herb Evert, Office of Registration, University of Wisconsin, telephone interview, 19 July 1985.
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- ²¹Warren Sherk, Agnes Moorehead: A Very Private Person, Philadelphia: Dorance and Co., 1976, p.26.
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- ²⁴Sherk, Agnes Moorehead, p. 27.
- ²⁵Sherk, Agnes Moorehead, p. 28.
- ²⁶Parish, Good Dames, p. 80.
- ²⁷Ibid.
- ²⁸Parish, Good Dames, p. 80.
- ²⁹Ibid.
- ³⁰Parish, Good Dames, p. 80.
- ³¹Helen Bowers, "You Make your Own Lucky Breaks," Detroit Free Press, 23 February 1958, n. p.
- ³²"An Earful From a Witch," San Diego Union, 16 March 1968, p. E-3.
- ³³Sherk, Agnes Moorehead, p.32.
- ³⁴Sherk, Agnes Moorehead, p. 7.
- ³⁵Sherk, Agnes Moorehead, p. 30.
- ³⁶Mary Jacobs, "She Admits She Doesn't Like to See Her Work," Oakland (CA) Tribune, 2 February 1936, n.p.
- ³⁷John Stanley, "Radio's 'Wrong Number' Gave Agnes Her Finest Hysteria," San Francisco Chronicle, 19 May 1974, p. 22.
- ³⁸"Agnes Moorehead," Variety, 8 May 1974, p. 286.

- ³⁹Stanley, "Radio's 'Wrong Number,'" p. 22.
- ⁴⁰Dorothy Manners, "Agnes Moorehead: Hollywood's Party Lady," n.p.
- ⁴¹Parish, Good Dames, p. 107.
- ⁴²Roberta Gratz, "The Voice is Still Bewitching," New York Post, 11 January 1969, n.p.
- ⁴³"That Fabulous Redhead - Press Kit," in Agnes Moorehead Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, n.d. (c. 1954), p.22.
- ⁴⁴Untitled, Cleveland Press, 1 March 1951, n. p.
- ⁴⁵"Follow-up Comment," Variety, 15 March 1939, p. 38.
- ⁴⁶Parish, Good Dames, p. 84.
- ⁴⁷Parish, Good Dames, p. 88.
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- ⁵⁰Sherk, Agnes Moorehead, p. 80.
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- ⁵⁴Lucille DeView, "Agnes Moorehead at 'Fiddler,'" Detroit News, 1 November 1971, p. 2-E.
- ⁵⁵Okon, "An Actress Speaks Out," n. p.
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- ⁵⁷Parish, Good Dames, p. 114.
- ⁵⁸"The Pink Jungle," Variety, 21 October 1959, n. p.

⁵⁹Gynter Quill, "Dallas," in Best Plays of 1965-66, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1966), pp. 50-51.

⁶⁰Vernon Scott, "Actress Moorehead is Demon for Work," Newark Evening News, 3 September 1967, p. E-4.

⁶¹Margaret Harford, "Moorehead Method: Work, Work, Work." Los Angeles Times, 7 November 1965, n.p.

Chapter II

Moorehead and "Don Juan In Hell"

The public reading career of Agnes Moorehead began in 1950. In the spring of that year she was in France filming The Adventures of Captain Fabian with Errol Flynn when she received a telegram from Paul Gregory. Gregory wired to her an invitation to join the cast of his new production, which would begin touring in the fall. The play, to be directed by Charles Laughton, was a cutting of the third act of Man and Superman by George Bernard Shaw to be entitled Don Juan In Hell.

Moorehead was a friend of Charles Laughton, but they had never worked together. She had met Gregory through Laughton. She knew both to be dedicated professionals with high ideals. Above all, Moorehead, like the rest of the theatrical community, was well aware of the reputation of the partnership of Laughton and Gregory.

These two men had presented a series of solo reading programs featuring Laughton, who received resounding acclaim for his artistic merits through his performances; while Gregory had achieved a financial success for both of them that many theatre professionals thought unimaginable. Most

actors and producers believed public readings to be too esoteric and therefore limited in appeal. That Laughton and Gregory had done the impossible (i.e., make money) was truly astounding. Moorehead accepted the offer by return wire.

Laughton, Gregory and "An Armful of Books"

Charles Laughton directed Moorehead in Don Juan In Hell and also staged That Fabulous Redhead, Moorehead's one-woman show. His knowledge of the art of reading aloud to others was thorough and uncontestable. Many of the techniques that he employed in his own reading program were employed in Moorehead's show. Therefore, it is appropriate that a discussion of his work and philosophy of reading aloud be incorporated into the present study.

Charles Laughton was born in Scarsborough, England, in the year 1899. His parents owned hotels, and he, as the eldest son, was expected to take over the family business in his turn. Though he served an apprenticeship in London at Claridges, Laughton, who had been an ardent lover of theatre from childhood, held no desire to be an "innkeeper." However, he did submit to parental pressure and worked in his family's hotels for some time.

Laughton fulfilled his need to act by participating in the productions of the local amateur dramatic group. There he was admired, and his father encouraged Laughton to continue his involvement with the theatre. He made a

decision to return to London and to study acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA). His mother thought him foolish; nevertheless, he auditioned before the board of the academy. His audition won him a scholarship.¹

Laughton was considered an outstanding pupil at the RADA and after two years was graduated with honors. Not long after graduation he began to achieve success on the London stage. It was his performance in Heartbreak House by Shaw that brought him to Broadway, where the play was transferred after its London closing. In New York, Laughton was noticed by talent scouts from the film industry and was soon employed in the motion picture business in California. Laughton became a major motion picture star. His career in films was to span the decades from 1930 through 1960.

Laughton had a passion for reading as a child, and it was natural for him to want to share his experiences of literature with others. He would often entertain the members of his family's hotel staff with readings from books and plays that he enjoyed or with simply staged dramatic recitations.

As a man in his early twenties, Laughton was made aware of the loss of power of words to communicate when they were subjugated to the interests of spectacle on the stage. This loss was brought home to him by the English actor, Basil Gill, who had been a member of Sir Herbert Beerbohm-Tree's company.

In a short essay entitled "Where Do We Go From Here,"

Laughton writes that Gill:

"was angry and wanted to hear the words again and I did not understand his anger then because like all my generation I had been brought up to look at the expense of listening and that is not fair either because looking is almost as important as listening but at gestures and not at millinery and paint and stained beams of light and so years afterward I became angry too and understood Basil Gill's anger and set to work."²

Gill insisted that actors must employ textual study and vocalization of scripts if they were to communicate the meaning of the play. It was Gill's insistence which had prompted Laughton to begin a study of the art of reading aloud.

In 1948, Laughton took on as students a number of young actors, including Robert Ryan and Shelley Winters. He and his students studied literature through oral performance. Together they read the plays of Shakespeare as well as the fairy tales of Hans Christian Anderson. Though Laughton described the experience with these students as "discovery among friends" of the values in the work of literature at hand, he stressed his philosophy of reading. He advocated reading that brought out both the meaning and the music in a given piece; however, Laughton cautioned his students to maintain "a scrupulous adherence to the meaning of texts, and a refusal to be simply 'musical' sacrificing meaning to mellifluous delivery."³

In a Time magazine interview, Laughton outlined a six step program for reading aloud to others:

1. Don't sit down: breathing and reading come easier when standing.
2. Speak naturally: use your normal voice.
3. Don't go highbrow: read what you know, understand and enjoy.
4. Never make reading a chore: stop if you become tired or bored.
5. Let your listeners alone: don't make them feel listening is a duty.
6. When you stop reading, start talking: discuss your reaction, and those of your listeners, to the literary experience.⁴

During the Second World War, Laughton often entertained recuperating military personnel at Army and Navy hospitals in and around Los Angeles. This activity was for him an enlightenment because he discovered that the soldiers and sailors were not like sophisticated audiences who listened with politeness whether or not they understood what was being read.

These men were not opposed to questioning the material read or Laughton's performance of it. Laughton writes:

When they didn't understand [they] said so out loud and if I didn't understand either I learned to admit it and that it is not so easy as it sounds when you have gone along shamming for so long and when I did understand and they did not, I knew I wasn't doing it right and wrestled with it until they did and there was a fine feeling between us for they never allowed me to think they understood when they didn't.⁵

The hospital performances taught Laughton that he could do what Gill demanded: interpret literature orally to communicate its meaning.

Laughton continued to perform as an oral reader after

the war. He always insisted that he was not an organizer, and therefore his reading engagements were few. In November, 1949, he contracted with Ed Sullivan to appear on The Toast of The Town, a television show that was broadcast from New York. Laughton read from The Book of Daniel, a reading that became a turning point in his public reading career because in the viewing audience there was an organizer.

The viewer's name was Paul Gregory. As a boy he was interested in the theatre and staged plays in his parents' barn with the help of neighborhood children. After graduating from Drake University, he headed to Hollywood and attempted to find work as an actor. Gregory did eventually obtain a motion picture screen test, but, after viewing the product, he concluded that acting was not meant for him.

He worked a series of jobs until as an independent producer, he produced a concert tour for Dennis Morgan, the singer, that got him noticed by Music Corporation of America (MCA). He was asked to join MCA as Vice-President in charge of the New York concert division.

Gregory was employed by MCA on the night he saw Laughton read on television. He was so impressed with Laughton that he immediately went to the theatre and introduced himself. Twice he proposed that Laughton allow him to produce a series of reading concerts. Laughton was dubious but accepted the proposal. MCA, however, did not believe the idea to be a good one, arguing that booking singers is a different matter

from booking readers. Gregory quit his job and became an independent producer.⁶

Laughton and Gregory's production was titled An Armful of Books. Gregory's promotional techniques were simple; he would go to a town, hire a hall, and then sell tickets to charitable groups for a dollar a ticket. The groups would resell the tickets at whatever price they wished. Using this tactic, Gregory was able to insure a profit of no less than \$1,200 for each of the early bookings. This sum was respectable in terms of the buying power of the 1950 dollar.

When the tour was more established, Gregory altered his strategy: he would find local sponsors for his productions who would guarantee against any loss. In return for a secured payment, the sponsors received the talents of Laughton and Gregory's skills as a publicist with his knowledge of radio, television, and newspaper advertising. Laughton toured with his solo performances for five years in between other commitments, and during that time he and Gregory often commanded as much as \$5,000 to \$7,000 a performance.⁷ These are sums that top Broadway actors did not command for their performances until the late 1950's.⁸ However, these Broadway actors were paid these sums for a week of performances.

Moorehead believed that Laughton, like her friend Orson Welles, was a genius, but Laughton was a more disciplined artist. He was also a Yorkshireman who knew the value of a dollar.⁹ Laughton, therefore, never failed to give his

audience in the space of two hours a completely entertaining performance for the price of their admission.

His program of readings consisted of selections from the works of Shaw, Thomas Wolf, James Thurber, Aesop, Charles Dickens, Abraham Lincoln, and the Bible among others. Laughton would begin with short, amusing pieces that were easy to enjoy, and, by judging the reactions of his audiences, he would begin to incorporate more lengthy and intricate selections as the audiences' attention span increased. His program was formed from selections that were strongly narrative and that presented "sharply defined characters." He avoided material that contained too much symbolism or abstraction.¹⁰

Laughton began his performance by entering from the wings without an introduction. His performance persona was that of an "affable and dominant personality" that enthralled his audiences.¹¹ His selections were memorized, through he used books as props throughout a performance. His vocal delivery was his major asset. Laughton's voice was flexible, well modulated and resonant. Variety wrote at the time of his death that it "was possibly the greatest tribute paid by an audience that his voice alone carried enough power, emotion and pure natural theatrical instinct to keep them transfixed for hours."¹²

Don Juan In Hell

Though they had agreed to a five year contract with ten weeks per year, Laughton and Gregory began to discuss arrangements for other reading productions before the end of their first season. Gregory told his partner how he had once been overcome by a simple display in a Tiffany window. The display featured four diamonds, each set on a miniature barstool painted black and backed with a black velvet curtain. This sparked in Gregory's mind an idea to duplicate the arrangement on stage with four actors.¹³ A production staged in this manner would provide heightened emphasis for any text, Gregory believed. He wanted to call his actors The First Drama Quartet.

Laughton thought the idea was a brilliant piece of showmanship, but Gregory did not know what material to use with his staging. Laughton, who had been an admirer of George Bernard Shaw since his days at the Academy, where he met Shaw, suggested the third act dream sequence of Man and Superman. Gregory was unfamiliar with the play; so Laughton read the act to him. When the reading was finished, Gregory knew they had found the perfect script. They would form a company and tour with it under the title Don Juan In Hell.

The Text

Bernard Shaw wrote Man and Superman in 1901, and the play had its London premiere in 1907. The third act is a dream sequence with only four characters: Don Juan; Dona Ana;

Ana's father in the form of a statue; and the Devil. The act is dissimilar in style from the rest of Shaw's play, and it does nothing to propel the play's action forward. It is, in essence, the playwright's opportunity to state and expound upon the play's major thesis. Laughton described the act as "the longest theatrical aside in the history of drama, fitted more for the library than the stage."¹⁴ For this reason it is generally deleted from productions.

Shaw was familiar with the legend of Don Juan in all of its literary forms. His foremost models were the opera Don Giovanni by Mozart and a Punch and Judy version of the legend which was performed in the streets and parks of London. The text contains little action, but the dialogue contains some of the author's most profound philosophical thinking as well as his most clever and witty speeches.

The text can be described as oratorical. It is written in the form of a "Shavian-Socratic debate" with a question followed by a lengthy formal statement, followed by another question and its accompanying statement, and so on.

The script is a long, oratorical discussion of the force which controls nature. This force Shaw terms the Life Force, which has as its purpose the attainment of the highest good. The Life Force uses man as a catalyst for this attainment.¹⁵

The action of Don Juan In Hell takes place after those incidents depicted in Mozart's opera. The setting is a void where all is vanity. It is a place where every whim is fulfilled and the Devil is "the leader of the best society."

Don Juan is found in abject and solitary contemplation. He has made a decision to go to heaven, where a soul can spend an eternity in serious contemplation. Dona Ana, a new arrival, is appalled to discover that she has been assigned to hell. She is not appeased when her father informs her that he plans to come to hell, since heaven is so dull that "only Englishmen can endure it."

The Devil is pleased with the statue's proposal and disappointed in Don Juan. He had assumed that Don Juan would find hell to be suitable in the light of his activities during his lifetime. There is nothing accomplished by its inhabitants, who pursue the trivial and seek self-gratification. In heaven, Don Juan argues, the inhabitants can help mankind find perfection through their contemplation.

The devil scoffs at this idea. He maintains that man does not want perfection but is caught up in the pursuit of destruction. He establishes his point by explaining that man spends the greatest amounts of his time and energy developing more and better engines of warfare with which to torture one another.

In his rebuttal, Don Juan contends that that is why the Life Force needs the contemplative efforts of those in heaven. It is through those efforts that mankind can become transformed into a perfect student of the Good whose purpose is the betterment of mankind's lot. Don Juan defines this perfect man as the Superman, and he leaves for heaven. Dona

Ana asks the Devil where is the Superman. He replies that he has not yet been born. Don Juan In Hell ends with Dona Ana going to find "a father for the Superman."

The Company

Laughton and Gregory agreed that they wanted a company that was composed of the "best voices in America."¹⁶ It was Laughton's intention to play the role of Don Juan. Gregory was opposed to this casting; he believed the production would surely fail if Laughton played Don Juan. Gregory was adamant that Laughton's physical appearance was wrong for the role. Laughton was hurt. He knew that Don Juan would be the only opportunity he would ever have to play a romantic figure. The partners quarreled, but Laughton realized that Gregory was absolutely right.¹⁷ Laughton played the role of the Devil.

Gregory chose Charles Boyer for the part of Don Juan. Boyer, of course, was a famous matinee idol in the motion pictures of the 1930's. He had studied acting at the Conservatoire National de Francaise and had become an incredible success on the Paris stage when still in his early twenties. He had also performed in the French cinema, which eventually led to a career in American films.

Shaw was Boyer's favorite playwright,¹⁸ but Boyer was shocked by Gregory's offer. He feared that his accent would be a liability to the production and a distraction to the

audience. Gregory convinced him that his accent would provide warmth and intimacy to the vocal quality of the show and that the audience would listen to Boyer and hear Shaw. Gregory also insisted that Boyer was "a master of the tirade, and as such was invaluable in [the] play. Not every actor can handle that difficult form of dramatic speech."¹⁹

The role of the Statue was given to Sir Cedric Hardwicke. Hardwicke had been knighted by George V for his contributions to the English Theatre, and he was a personal friend of the playwright. Shaw had written The Apple Cart especially for him. When Gregory made his offer, Hardwicke thought he was listening to a "raving maniac."

Hardwicke had become disenchanted with the theatre of his day, where every show was done behind the proscenium arch, and disillusioned by a theatrical climate where the purpose of making money was tantamount to success. He found the staging concept for Don Juan In Hell inventive and creative. Writing after the fact, he stated:

The audience is much more deeply involved in what it is witnessing when it is not divided by footlights from a picture frame setting. . . . The stark simplicity of the open stage invites actor and author in what to me is the supreme art, in which the audience must join in and not merely eavesdrop. . . .

.20

Hardwicke was enticed into accepting the role because of Laughton and Gregory's zealous efforts to present a stimulating, thought-provoking and uplifting evening of theatre.

Shaw wanted Gregory to cast Dame Peggy Ashcroft in the part of Dona Ana. Gregory insisted that American audiences would not understand the play if it was forced to listen to too many British accents. However, the company used Standard British Stage Speech,²¹ the traditional pronunciation of words approved by the English speaking theatrical community of the period. Standard British Stage Speech is based upon the pronunciation of sounds used by the English educated class. It was appropriate that Standard British Stage Speech was used for this production, and, in the original cast album, Moorehead sounds only slightly less British than her fellow players with the exception of Boyer. Gregory wanted Agnes Moorehead for the role.²²

Moorehead stated in an interview twenty years after the production that she was given the role because she was a close friend of Charles Laughton.²³ Laughton admired Moorehead because:

she is this profession . . . better than anyone I know. She is dedicated and talented and honorable. She is always the consummate actress and always the consummate lady. And if anyone else is a better actor I'd like to know who that person would be. She simply represents everything that is noble about our craft.²⁴

He accepted her for the role of Dona Ana because she "could play any kind of female at the drop of a hat."²⁵

The Role of Dona Ana

The role of Dona Ana is the smallest in Don Juan In Hell. People who have written about her career assign various reasons for Moorehead's acceptance of the role. In Good Dames, James Robert Parish presents a list that includes the most representative of these reasons. He writes:

1. "She respected the property."
(Moorehead thought the play "timely.")
2. "Live theatre experiences for the actor refreshes his technique."
3. "She respected the other actors."
4. "The womanly nature of Agnes revelled at the opportunity of appearing to the public in a new guise as a well dressed lady."²⁶ (Moorehead appeared in an evening gown of mauve - her favorite color - that was designed especially for the production by Walter Plunkett).

However, none of the writers mentions the demands of the role itself as reason enough to accept it. These demands are twofold. First, Dona Ana exhibits a wide vocal range. Moorehead had to portray two distinct ages with her voice as well as convey many emotional states. Second, Moorehead was also required to portray the character through stylized movement as well as remain physically restrained though attentive throughout much of the playing time.

Vocally, Moorehead had to portray with her voice two separate and distinct age categories. Dona Ana is an aged woman of eighty at curtain rise. Moorehead achieved this aged voice through crisp pronunciation in combination with a brittle vocal quality.

Later, when she is told by Don Juan that bodies are but an illusion in hell and the uninhibited continue to use them

because that is how they are accustomed to presenting themselves, Dona Ana changes, at Don Juan's suggestion, into a young woman of twenty-seven. It is after this transformation that the two recognize each other from their lives on earth, and it is this age Dona Ana assumes during the rest of the show. This voice was closest to Moorehead's normal speaking voice. A British critic described Moorehead as possessing "the kind of voice designed to shatter the reasoning of men."²⁷

Dona Ana reflects the widest range of emotions in the play, and Moorehead had to portray these emotions with her voice. Dona Ana is at various times confused, bewildered, enchanted, frightened, indignant or disgusted, to list a few of her emotional stops. These emotions, moreover, were revealed within numerous subtextual situations that required Moorehead to demonstrate Dona Ana's coquetry, her shrewishness, her pridefulness as well as her affability.

Staging

Gregory's original idea of four actors sitting on four stools was augmented by the use of four music stands, on which each actor placed a copy of the script, and by four microphones. In a lecture to the Western Speech Association, Moorehead explained the use of these added staging elements and the effects they had upon the movements.

All four actors had been trained for the stage, and they

were well versed in the art of vocal projection. However, music stands were introduced as a means of better emphasizing the relationship the actors had to a group of chamber musicians. It was an appropriate choice that signaled to the audience that they were listening to a quartet who had substituted a script for a musical score. They were also practical insofar as they allowed the actors to place the scripts near them so they could use their bodies and not be encumbered.

The scripts were memorized. Moorehead stated that it would have been impossible actually to read, since the glare of the stage lights would not allow it. However, they entered with their scripts in hand, and this technique lent an air of informality to the evening.

More important, Laughton directed the actors to use their scripts to provide spectacle. They were limited in movement within a confined space between the stools and the music stands,²⁸ but through the process of artful selection, the four managed to suggest their characters' emotional responses through the turning of pages. For example, when Dona Ana was angry, Moorehead would slam the page over, or when the character was being overtly feminine, the actress would turn the page slowly and pat it down sensuously. The male actors used similar techniques to suggest their characters' appropriate emotional reactions. In this manner, the ideas in the text were punctuated, and the actors were given more opportunities to be expressive.

The microphones served to keep the actors in place and not allow them to wander too far from their stools and music stands. On a more practical note, the microphones eliminated vocal strain, which could have been possible, since the company performed as many as six nights a week during the season.

As mentioned above, all of the four actors had been trained in the theatre and thought they had no problems with vocal projection. Nonetheless, many of the places in which they played were not true theatres but gymnasiums and the like. It was essential that every audience member hear the text; so microphones were used. The microphones, therefore, served the purpose of amplifying voices. Moorehead pointed out, however, that volume levels were set according to the needs of the hall in which the play was performed and that in well constructed theatres with good acoustics the microphones were turned off completely.²⁹

Photographs of Moorehead in the character of Dona Ana, which appeared in Life magazine, reveal her use of expressive, stylized movements to suggest moods and ideas. Her transformation into youth was accomplished by a relaxation of facial muscles. One reviewer found this transformation "phenomenal" and found that Moorehead did indeed become "a much younger and more beautiful woman."³⁰ Many of her movements of arms and hands were textbook examples of stock gestures found in books on delivery. What made her gestures more than commonplace was the evident and

viable grace with which the actress controlled her body. To illustrate, when Dona Ana interrupts the Devil's speech, Moorehead elevated and extended her right arm while slightly lifting her forefinger. The photograph in Life illustrated Moorehead's ability to turn this simple movement into an arresting pose of disdainful indignation that conveyed both power and beauty. Similarly with folded arms held close to the bosom Moorehead demonstrated the universal symbol of nurturing motherhood. The gesture was complemented with facial expression that denoted contented fulfillment.

Moorehead left no record of the process she used in ordering the selection and arrangement of her gestures. Furthermore, it is not known to what extent Laughton as her director guided her in this process. It is interesting to note that many of the body positions taken by Moorehead during performance paralleled with only slight variance the figures provided in Gilbert Austin's Chironomia: or Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery, written in the eighteenth century. For example, Dona Ana's act of praying resembles Austin's Figure 105 (Plate 10), which is described as veneration, with only the slightest modification. Furthermore, Moorehead's stance taken during her last line "a father for the Superman" is an exact copy of Figure 121 (Plate 11). There is no evidence in the available reference sources that indicate that either Laughton or Moorehead was familiar with Austin's work.

Touring "Don Juan In Hell"

Don Juan In Hell premiered at Claremont College on 28 January 1951, after a month of rehearsal. Laughton was so nervous that he forgot to deliver his seemingly-impromptu but carefully prepared introduction and began the play by reading from the stage directions. The response from the audience soon alleviated Laughton's fears that he had made a mistake in his staging. The actors were a great success.

The company plus four non-acting employees were to spend the next five months criss-crossing America and Canada. They followed the almost identical touring schedule that Laughton had taken with An Armful of Books. Moorehead termed the tour "backbreaking." They played six nights a week for twenty weeks covering seventy cities from coast to coast.

It was Gregory's initial decision to avoid New York City on the first tour. He was doubtful that New Yorkers would appreciate the production, mistaking the minimal staging as a means of cutting production costs instead of recognizing it as a valid concept which placed emphasis upon the text. For that reason, he defied theatrical convention by taking his production directly to the American heartland before it had received the seal of approval from New York critics. He insisted that only outside of New York would the production be appreciated for its own merits. Moorehead defined this approach to touring succinctly when she wrote:

That was what we wanted. That was what we believed;

that audiences were hungry for good theatre, that they were far above the low average mental level generally credited them by theatrical managers and producers, and that great circles of culture were to be found all over this vast country of ours."³¹

A report featured in the trade paper Variety, which extolled the artistic and financial success of the production, brought it to the attention of the Shubert organization. Representatives from this theatre syndicate convinced Gregory to bring Don Juan In Hell to New York.

The play opened at Carnegie Hall on 22 October 1951, for one night. The pre-publicity sparked a rush at the box office, and all tickets for the performance were sold eight hours after the box office opened. The play was then moved to the Brooklyn Academy of Music for a brief run and then to the Shubert's Century Theatre for a month. After closing in New York, the company went back on the road but appeared again in New York at the end of April, 1952.

The critical response was completely favorable. The majority of reviews focused their discussion upon the merits of the staging. It was applauded for its innovations and creativity. Two of the most prominent critics of the day, George Jean Nathan and John Mason Brown, were each enthusiastic in their praise, but differed over how best to label the actors' technique. Nathan argued that the actors had revived the art of acting used in Shakespeare's time. The lack of set, he stated, freed the audience's imagination in the same manner that lack of setting freed Shakespeare's

audience and allowed them to bring their own creative energies into the play. Nathan wrote: "The illusion is remarkable, and it goes to show that no one or nothing can equal the human fancy when it is or even isn't in the least assisted by outside agents."³²

Brown viewed the technique as a "recitation--a--nineteenth century form of instruction and entertainment in which students and performers gave memorized oral deliveries of prepared speeches."³³ It was a style which Brown maintained was "somewhere between declamation and acting."

Writing some years later, Moorehead explained that their technique was as old as the art of acting itself. It was the form used by the ancient Greek storytellers, or rhapsodes, who took their works to the people and recited what they had composed.³⁴ It was also the technique of the Greek actor who was confined in his movements and was forced to rely on his vocal abilities to stimulate his audiences' minds to fill in any missing scenic details.

Boyer received the lion's share in personal notices, but each member of the troupe was praised for his or her achievements. Moorehead was singled out most particularly because she was the only female member, able to hold her own in such great company, though the male players outtalked her. She was applauded for her clever portrayal of the two ages of Dona Ana. She was also pleased to be told how charming and desirable she looked in her elegant evening gown. That was

no small wonder when it is remembered that the movie-going public was used to seeing her as either a severe spinster or as a drab, plain Jane.

On the whole, the company was congratulated for its ensemble work. Each role received the exact amount of emphasis that it required. No one tried to upstage the others. In Moorehead's words: "Everyone was on his toes; everyone felt a responsibility toward his part and toward each other. Everyone felt a responsibility to the audience. . . ." ³⁵ Each of the players was committed to offering the audience the best in theatre, and no one allowed personal egotism to interfere with the presentation of Shaw's ideas. The players "respected each other personally and professionally. No one was playing a solo performance." ³⁶

The company remained together for four ³⁷ seasons, playing dates throughout the concert season with the spring and summer off for other professional commitments. Moorehead throughout her life referred to her participation in Don Juan In Hell as the "highlight" of her career and as one of her "most cherished moments." "It was like a finishing course, . . . to be able to perform this play with the likes of Laughton, Boyer and Hardwicke. Every night was a new experience. This seldom happens to an actor. If I never acted again, I'd be happy for having done this remarkable show." ³⁸

The tour had not been without its troubles, however, and Moorehead delighted in offering anecdotes about the tour.

For example, she remembered a night in Kansas City when an "army of ants" crawled down from the rigging and covered the stage. "Trying to perform while these creatures were in your hair, down the inside of your costumes, just everywhere can be unnerving. The graceful gesture becomes a little forced."³⁹ Or the night she was rebuked by her director:

Sometimes when you feel you are doing your best you really aren't. This was a time like that. I thought I was just soaring. You feel all this superfluous freedom that you didn't have before. Afterwards Charles said, 'What's wrong with you tonight. Go back to what you did last night.'⁴⁰

Moorehead was later to use this story when speaking before young theatre students about the need to maintain control and not become so overly involved with his or her performance that he or she loses perspective. She remembers as well the nights when something wonderful happened between the cast and the audiences and all were seemingly transported to tremendous heights of emotion and enlightenment. Such a night occurred when Don Juan In Hell was performed at Oklahoma State University. At the end of the performance both cast and audience were standing, applauding one another with tears streaming down their cheeks. When in later years Moorehead was asked by friends and interviewers why she toured so often, she insisted that it was because of the audience to be found outside the great metropolitan areas. Her personal catch phrase for these situations was "you haven't done theatre until you've played Stillwater, Oklahoma."

Moorehead Directs "Don Juan In Hell"

After the close of Don Juan In Hell, Moorehead went back to her film career. She bought and furnished a house on Roxbury Drive in Beverly Hills from the money she had made on the tour. The gross profit from the four-season tour came to over one million dollars; the start-up expense had only been \$25,000. Moorehead and the other actors each received ten percent of the gross profit.

But the close of Don Juan In Hell was not to be the end of Moorehead's association with the play. In 1955, she was offered the opportunity to direct the play to be produced by a Mr. Goldberg. The actors hired for this production included Edward Arnold (who was replaced by Kurt Kasner when the illness that ended Arnold's life began) as the Devil, Ricardo Montalban as Don Juan, Reginald Denny as the Statue and Mary Astor in the role of Dona Ana.

Mary Astor, writing about the production in her autobiography, offers great praise for the abilities of Moorehead as director:

I liked Agnes Moorehead-"Aggie"-as we called her. A fine actress, now she proved to be an excellent director . . . she knew all (of the play's) values. . . Aggie stressed the importance of playing it like a quartette, with great precision of movement, with harmony.⁴¹

Moorehead gave the text the same treatment as Laughton. Again there were four stools, four music stands and four microphones. From the description of this production written

by Astor, it was almost a duplicate in style and manner of the Laughton-Gregory presentation. Moorehead employed Laughton's techniques of punctuating ideas by the turning of pages as well as sitting and rising on specific "word cues." Moorehead was especially instructive to Astor, sharing with her all of the "tricks" that she had learned from playing the role.

It was not a successful tour, however. Moorehead's Don Juan In Hell opened at the Geary Theatre in San Francisco on Monday, 19 September 1955. This was to be the high point of the tour, Astor recalls. "The old theatre rocked with applause and laughter between the long periods of intense stillness and concentration."⁴² But the producer was not a professional. "It was as though it had been set up as something to be deducted from a rich man's income tax."⁴³ They were to play many nights to many near empty auditoriums as they drifted through Canada and the American Northwest. The money promised was not paid, and each of the four actors became ill. The tour finally ended in November, 1955, after a week in Denver.

"Don Juan In Hell," 1972

Moorehead was not the type of person who could be comfortable with inactivity for any length of time. From the end of the first tour of Don Juan In Hell to three months before her death, she was on the road in one vehicle or

another. She always answered those who asked why she toured so much by telling them "that that was where the people are." Moorehead also knew that touring kept her before the public and that producers of films and plays sought actors who had a following.

In 1972, Moorehead once again accepted the role of Dona Ana. This production of Don Juan In Hell was directed by John Houseman, who had met Moorehead in the 1930's when they had both been associated with Orson Welles.

She took the part because "roles for 'mature' actresses seem to be scarcer by the season."⁴⁴ Moorehead was not looking forward to the contracted tour of six months because she knew how exhausting it would be. She was sixty-five and was already fighting the battle against the cancer that eventually took her life.

The producers of the tour had not previously produced for the stage, but both of them had backgrounds that qualified them for the demands of the job. They were Lee Orgel and William Griffiths. Orgel had produced Mr. Magoo cartoon television specials, and Griffiths was responsible for producing the Roller Game of the Week for a local Los Angeles television station. Moorehead had no doubts about their abilities, but she insisted that Houseman, Orgel and Griffiths allow her to have a say in the casting of the male actors for the production. She told them she "would only go out on tour with men who could interpret . . . and had some stature. I couldn't do it otherwise. It's a classic and you

have to have that kind of background or it just doesn't work."⁴⁵ The actors engaged were Edward Mulhare as the Devil, Paul Henreid as the Statue and Ricardo Montalban again in the role of Don Juan.

Henreid, who was both an actor and a director, had some doubts about the casting. He did not think Montalban's diction and accent would be adequate. He also thought Moorehead too old for the role of his daughter, especially since the part required her to age backwards in time. Henreid stated that the reason Moorehead was hired for the role of Dona Ana was that she owned Laughton's director's book from the original production. Laughton had given it to Moorehead, and Houseman cast her because he was eager to use the book.⁴⁶

The production was an almost exact replica of the earlier version. Again the music stands, the microphones and the stools were employed as set. Henreid had reservations about the production and constantly compared it to Laughton's production, which he had admired. For example, Henreid was concerned that Houseman spent too much time on "diction and pronunciation and neglected the sense and meaning of the play."⁴⁷ He was also skeptical of Houseman's decision to light the actors in red spots, which Henreid thought "corny and unsuitable" when Laughton had taken Shaw's suggestion to use "cold, blue-white light that gave an eerie quality to the players."⁴⁸

Rehearsals were held on the stage of the Ahmanson

Theatre in Los Angeles, but when it was otherwise occupied, they were moved to Moorehead's house. Houseman wrote that:

"Agnes sustained us with coffee and sandwiches and stimulated us with admonitions about the show she knew so well . . . reminding us of what Laughton had created so brilliantly 20 years before--why he had made the choices he did and how he amended them in response to audience reactions."⁴⁹

Don Juan In Hell opened 5 September 1972, at the Ahmanson Theatre and ran for three weeks. It then transferred to Fresno, California, and on to San Francisco for a week. The tour took the company from coast to coast, playing dates in Detroit, Cincinnati and Washington, D.C., among other cities. The final stop was the Palace Theatre in New York City, where the play opened 15 January 1973. The play and the cast received good reviews, much to Henreid's amazement. The cast was praised for their clarity of diction. Richard Watts, writing in the New York Post, noted that this production contained more movement than the first and that Montalban's performance was his favorite of the four.⁵⁰ Many critics, however, stated their disapproval to references of hydrogen bombs during the show, which they considered "unnecessary" and "blatant" updating of the script.

Moorehead's personal notices were similar to those she had received twenty years before. She and Henreid were acknowledged for breathing "into the presentation the illusion of action and spontaneity."⁵¹ Moorehead was cited again for her ability to transform herself into a vibrant,

youthful-appearing lady and for her elegant and graceful gestures.⁵² But it was her ability to characterize which earned her the most praise from the critics. Jerry Stein, writing for the Cincinnati Post, summarized her performance by stating:

Shaw conceives her (Dona Ana) as the calculating, matrimonial huntress. There seems to be always an ulterior layer to Ana's every utterance of which Ms. Moorehead makes us conscious.⁵³

Moorehead had made Dona Ana one of the major accomplishments of her career. It was the most illustrious of all her stage roles and was to become almost her personal property during her life in the same manner as the character of Mrs. Stevenson in the radio drama Sorry, Wrong Number. Moorehead was fond of comparing the play to great music and often said that "you could put a metronome down and it [the play] just absolutely beats to the time."⁵⁴ She never lost her admiration for Dona Ana. A year before her death she remarked: "I still find the role and the play one of the most exciting things in my career."⁵⁵

Summary

Agnes Moorehead was a member of The First Drama Quartet and toured with the original production of Don Juan In Hell during the theatrical seasons of 1951 through 1954. The company traveled throughout the United States and received praise from the critics and the public. The character of

Dona Ana was known as Moorehead's most famous stage role.

A year after the original production folded, Moorehead directed another touring company of Shaw's play with Mary Astor in the role of Dona Ana. It was not a successful production either critically or financially. However, Moorehead received praise from the company for her knowledge of the play as well as her abilities as a director.

Moorehead repeated the role of Dona Ana during the early 1970's. Though she was twenty years older, Moorehead again charmed the critics and the public with her captivating performance.

Endnotes

¹Charles Higham, Charles Laughton: An Intimate Biography, NY: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1976, pp. 6-7.

²Charles Laughton, "Where Do We Go From Here," (typewritten) n.d., p.1, in Agnes Moorehead Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI., Box 54, Folder 4, p.1. (Laughton's writing style is a construction of run-on sentences and contains little punctuation.)

³Higham, Charles Laughton, p. 147.

⁴Time "The Happy Ham," (March 31, 1952), p. 61, cited by James Lester Johnson, The Art of Paul Gregory An Examination of Gregory's Historic, Aesthetic and Pedagogic Contributions to Interpretation and Theatre. (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1981), pp. 261-262.

⁵Laughton, "Where Do We Go From Here." pp. 2-3. (q.v.: footnote 2.)

⁶James Lester Johnson, The Art of Paul Gregory: An Examination of Gregory's Historic, Aesthetic and Pedagogic Contributions to Interpretation and Theatre, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, May, 1981, pp. 20-23.

⁷Paul Gregory, interview held at his home, Palm Springs, California, May 26, 1979, in James Lester Johnson, The Art of Paul Gregory, p. 28.

⁸Jo Ann Beier, "School's Stage, Too, Agnes Moorehead," Madison (WI) State Journal, 8 Nov., 1957, n.p.

⁹Richard Hammer, "Show Business Is All Business," The Nation, 26 Sep. 1959, pp. 172-3, in American Culture In The Sixties, ed. Viney Colby (New York: H. W. Wilson, Co. 1964), p. 140.

¹⁰James E. Lennon and William W. Hamilton, "Charles Laughton's Interpretive Reading," Speech Teacher 4 (March 1955), pp. 86-88.

¹¹Ibid., p. 87.

¹²"Charles Laughton," Variety, 19 December 1962, n.p.

¹³Johnson, Art of Paul Gregory, p. 44.

¹⁴"The Happy Ham," in Johnson, p. 61.

¹⁵Johnson, Art of Paul Gregory, pp. 50-52.

¹⁶Kurt Singer, The Laughton Story: An Intimate Story of Charles Laughton, (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, Co., 1954), p.257.

¹⁷Paul Gregory, interview held at his home, Palm Springs, Ca., May 26, 1979, in Johnson, Art of Paul Gregory, p. 50.

¹⁸Larry Swindell, Charles Boyer: The Reluctant Lover, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1983), p. 221.

¹⁹Johnson, Art of Paul Gregory, p. 46.

²⁰Sir Cedric Hardwicke with James Brough, A Victorian In Orbit: The Irreverent Memoirs of Sir Cedric Hardwicke, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Co., 1961), p. 268.

²¹Interview with Francine Merritt, Louisiana State University, Student Union, 8 August 1986. (Francine Merritt saw the original Laughton-Gregory production of Don Juan In Hell in New Orleans, LA., during the 1950's).

²²Johnson, Art of Paul Gregory, p. 48.

²³Mike Steen, Hollywood Speaks: An Oral History, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), p. 113.

²⁴"Agnes Moorehead: Chapter Five," typewritten manuscript in Agnes Moorehead Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI., Box 60, Folder 7, n.d., p.1.

²⁵Singer, The Laughton Story, p. 257.

²⁶James Robert Parish, Good Dames, (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, p. 1974), p. 100.

²⁷Hedda Hopper, "Modest Aggie Versatile, Beautiful," Los Angeles Times, 13 April 1952, p. 9.

²⁸Francine Merritt remembers that Moorehead moved in front of the reading stands and reclined upon a low settee during the course of the play while the men continued to talk behind her. She gave no speech from this position. This piece of blocking was not mentioned by any other reviewers of the program. This blocking may have been something Laughton chose to add during this night's engagement or added during a brief period while the company toured and later discarded. Interview with Francine Merritt, Louisiana State University, Student Union, 8 August 1986.

²⁹Agnes Moorehead, "Staging Don Juan In Hell," Western Speech Journal 18 (May 1954), pp. 163-166.

³⁰"'Don Juan' Proves Verbal Strip Tease," Los Angeles Times n.d., n.p.

³¹Moorehead, "Staging Don Juan In Hell," p. 165.

³²George J. Nathan, "Don Juan In Hell," Theatre Arts, January 1952, p. 80.

³³Johnson, Art of Paul Gregory, p. 75.

³⁴Parish, Good Dames, p. 100.

³⁵"Agnes Moorehead: Chapter Five," p.15

³⁶Moorehead, "Staging Don Juan In Hell," p. 165.

³⁷During the 1952-1953 season, Vincent Price assumed the role of the Devil while Laughton was filming a picture.

³⁸Warren Shirk, Agnes Moorehead: A Very Private Person, (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Co., 1976), p. 54.

³⁹"Agnes Moorehead: Chapter Five," p. 15.

⁴⁰Helen Fogel, "Agnes the Perennial: From Radio to Endora," Detroit Free Press, n.d., n.p.

⁴¹Mary Astor, My Story, An Autobiography, (Garden City, NY Doubleday and Co., 1959), p. 306.

⁴²Astor, My Story, p. 307.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Patricia Shelton, "Agnes Moorehead: You Don't Have to Have Talent to Take Your Clothes Off," Houston Chronicle, 10 November 1972, n.p.

⁴⁵Tom McElfresh, "Agnes Moorehead: Charming Onstage and Off," Cincinnati Enquirer, 22 November 1978, p. 8.

⁴⁶Paul Henreid with Julius Fash, Ladies' Man: An Autobiography, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1984), p. 245.

⁴⁷Henreid, Ladies' Man, p. 244.

⁴⁸Ibid, p. 245.

⁴⁹John Houseman, "Agnes Moorehead: 1906-1974," Los Angeles Times, 5 May 1974, p. 34.

⁵⁰Richard Watts, "Don Juan Prefers Heaven," New York Post, 16 January 1973, n.p.

⁵¹David Hale, "'Don Juan In Hell,'" Fresno Bee, 29 August 1972, n.p.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Jerry Stein, "Theatre: Talk in a Hot Spot," Cincinnati Post December, 1972, n.p.

⁵⁴McElfresh, "Agnes Moorehead," n.p.

⁵⁵William A. Raidy, "Enthusiasm, Wisdom after 50 years in Theatre," Corpus Christi, (TX) Caller-Times, 20 May 1973, n.p.

Chapter III

Moorehead's Solo Reading Career

During their years of touring together in Don Juan In Hell, the respect and admiration Charles Laughton held for Agnes Moorehead increased. He knew that her role of Dona Ana was not of sufficient length or depth to provide a significant challenge for her talent, and he often remarked that she must appear again in another vehicle that would offer a "greater personal triumph." To insure this end, he set about with the help and agreement of producer Paul Gregory to design a production which would showcase Moorehead's artistry.

Laughton and Gregory's first idea was to present Moorehead as the feminine lead in an adaptation of My Life and Hard Times by James Thurber. Accordingly, Gregory allowed a press release advertising the production to be printed in Variety on 11 November 1952. The program was to be entitled "Hard Times," and Laughton was announced as director. It was slated to tour in between seasons of Don Juan In Hell. A male lead, the article stated, had yet to be cast.¹ "Hard Times" was never produced.

Laughton and Gregory did not abandon their resolve to

develop a project for Moorehead. Discussions among the three continued through the final tour of Don Juan In Hell and it was decided that a program of readings modeled after Laughton's An Armful of Books was an appropriate showcase for Moorehead.

The reasons for this decision cannot be confirmed, but a knowledge of the interests and activities of the program's creators provide a source for arguable speculation. First, Laughton had toured in a similar program of readings and knew the requirements for structuring and staging this format. Second, Gregory, as producer, was familiar with the techniques of selling this format to sponsors and had many contacts on the concert-lecture circuit. Both men had enjoyed the experience.

This chapter provides an account of Moorehead's one-person show. During the sixteen-year period that constitutes her career as a solo performer, changes were made in the selections performed, the title was changed, and in some years Moorehead did not tour. For these reasons, the chapter is divided into sections that examine the history and staging of the original tour of 1954, and the history and the staging of all later tours. These historical surveys are followed by an analysis of those selections from her program that Moorehead recorded. The chapter concludes with an overview of the critical comments Moorehead received during her career as an oral reader.

That Fabulous Redhead - The Original Tour

Staging

A description of the staging of a program before the discussion of the program itself might seem an unusual beginning; however, the staging was the stable element. The thematic concept of Moorehead's one-woman show changed though the staging remained. Laughton was intrigued by Moorehead's feminine mystique as well as her ability to portray numerous types of females. His staging of her program was designed to enhance these qualities foremost.

There is no record of the decision-making process that established the set design. However, it seems that Laughton chose to make the production as simple as possible. Two considerations support this conclusion. First, a simple design with few pieces would allow for ease in the setting up and dismantling of a set used in a long tour, especially a tour like Moorehead's that incorporated into its schedule so many one night stands. Second, the simplicity of the stage setting eliminated all unessential elements that might distract the attention of the audience from Moorehead. The stage picture in its entirety maintained an illusion of "almost living room informality."² The theatre became Moorehead's home, where she invited her audience "into [her] living room on the stage to enjoy stories with [her]."³

To achieve this informal effect, Laughton used only

three major properties. The most elaborate of these pieces was an overlarge loveseat. It was larger than a chair but smaller than a sofa. It came with a cushion upon which to sit. However, the curved back remained cushionless with only the gilted frame which wrapped around the cushion exposed. Moorehead could rest both her hands on the downstage ends of the back by sitting in the exact middle of the cushion. Many reviewers described this loveseat as theatrical and certainly not an object found in an ordinary home. Nonetheless, it was as a rule agreed among them to be "a wide, handsome chair that could act as some modern queen's throne."⁴

The other major stage properties were a small table placed next to the loveseat and a telephone. The telephone was brought on stage during the second half of the program and set upon the table. The telephone was not a standard black model but of an ornate design often referred to as a "French Phone." These three items were the only pieces used, with the exception of a number of books which Moorehead brought on at the beginning of the program. These books, being "stagily marked with bright ribbons," contributed to the feminine aura surrounding the program as well as affording Moorehead some movements of whimsical humor in that the books were "dusted to appear ancient" and she removed the dust by merely blowing it away.⁵

The stage was lighted by a general area wash across the entire playing area. The wash was pink.⁶ The color undoubtedly added to the womanly mood established by the set

pieces. Pink is the preferred color used in the theatre and especially in musical comedy to light the playing areas of the more mature female actors. This color's properties soften the lines and wrinkles upon an actor's face and heighten the illusion of youth. These attributes were surely known by such seasoned professionals as Moorehead and Laughton. Moorehead was forty-seven the night her show opened.

The only other staging element used in production was costuming. Moorehead wore a gown not unlike the gown she had worn as Dona Ana. The gown for her one-woman show included a silver lame' sheath worn under a chiffon frock of pink and mauve. There were wide shoulder straps, though Moorehead's neck and arms were bare. Attached to the back of the frock was a floor length cape in the same material and colors as the gown. She used the cape to complement many of her gestures. She wore shoes with heels dyed mauve. Her jewelry was a necklace of rhinestones and emeralds with matching earrings. Her hair was braided into a bun on the top of her head and set with a tiara, the same tiara she wore in Don Juan In Hell. The terms most often used by reviewers to describe this total effect in costuming were "majestic" and "regal." It is also interesting to note that many reviewers who met Moorehead after a performance were surprised to discover that she was shorter than she appeared to be on stage.

Outline of Program and History of First Tour

The original working concept for Moorehead's one-woman reading program was a presentation of selections chosen to illustrate "different kinds of women through the ages."⁷ Laughton delighted in Moorehead's gift for portraying women of various social positions. He and Moorehead decided to construct a program that would highlight this gift.

During the last tour of Don Juan In Hell Laughton culled the material that he had collected for his own reading program looking for selections which Moorehead could use. He then passed these materials with appropriate comments about their suitability along to Moorehead.⁸ In her turn, Moorehead made suggestions based upon her own literary favorites. The program was formed in this matter of give and take between director and performer.

The original concept for the program was modified and enlarged during the period of script preparation. Several selections agreed upon by Laughton and Moorehead contain male characters, and the emphasis upon selections which dealt with only women was abandoned. The qualities inherent in the selections chosen for performance were assessed in relationship to Moorehead's talents and in relationship to her personality.

Laughton and Moorehead determined that the transitional passages in the program, that is, the scripted remarks made by the performer to connect selections one with another,

would be a series of personal anecdotes. In its final form, Moorehead's one-woman show became "a two-hour program of selections from a cross section of contemporary and classical writers"⁹ joined together by transitional material which reflected the most charming and attractive aspects of her personality. During performance, an audience was given the opportunity to enjoy works of literature appreciated by the performer.

Moorehead's performance also offered the audience the opportunity to befriend her. It is the contention of this author that in performance Moorehead created a persona that was designed to capture the affections of her audience and thereby win their approval of her readings. That is, Moorehead and Laughton chose to showcase the most admirable and delightful traits of her personality.

This author believes that every movement, every gesture and every inflection that Moorehead performed during the transitional passages was planned and executed so that the audience felt as close to Moorehead as to an old friend with whom they were more than willing to spend a pleasant evening. This feeling of warm intimacy between performer and audience that was established in the transitional passages created a receptivity in the audience for the performances of the works of literature presented in the program.

Laughton and Gregory dubbed Moorehead the Fabulous Redhead while touring with Don Juan In Hell. They used the adjective "fabulous" to describe her artistry. It also

referred to her personality, which both men found an enchanting blend of the grande dame and the girl-next-door. The "redhead" was self-explanatory, since Moorehead had been from birth red-haired. In fact, no writer who wrote about her appearance ever failed to mention her "titian" hair. Laughton and Gregory entitled her one-woman show That Fabulous Redhead. Moorehead thought the title flattering, but with her usual sense of self-deprecating humor she could not resist pointing out: "But suppose I'm NOT fabulous in the show."¹⁰

A synopsis of That Fabulous Redhead follows. It is based upon a copy of Moorehead's own script for the original production. This script is a part of Moorehead's theatrical mementos stored in the Archives of the State Historical Society in Madison, Wisconsin. The synopsis offers a detailed description of the literary selections that she performed as well as the transitional passages which connected them.

The show began without an introduction in the sense that Moorehead was presented to the audience. The audience was confronted with an open stage revealing the show's set when they entered the theatre. The stage manager gave Moorehead the word that the house was ready, the houselights dimmed, and she walked onto the stage. This was the same method Laughton employed in An Armful of Books. However, Laughton walked on with his books whereas Moorehead after her initial bow to the audience feigned forgetfulness, retreated to the

wings and then reappeared with books. This routine was her introduction.

Moorehead's program was divided into twenty-three individual segments. She read fifteen selections during her performance. However, for the purpose of this analysis, the first five brief selections that she read are discussed as one segment. The remaining twenty-two segments of her program consisted of ten selections and twelve transitional passages including the introduction and farewell.

Moorehead bridged the first two segments by commenting that she did not know where to begin. She suggested that it might be fun to read some household hints. There followed five brief selections by writers of the fourteenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They included a recipe for fourteenth century Cokyntrice, a "remedie for a gentlewoman's bruised withers caused by horseback riding," and the proper way to care for marble statues, written by Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher. The final two selections were a cure for a canary's asthma and the refined utilization of calling cards in the early twentieth century. Each selection was amusing and slightly ludicrous.

It is the author's opinion that the total effect was devised to set the audience at ease and to acclimate them to the conventions of the oral performance of literature. The selection and arrangement within Moorehead's program displayed a theory of oral interpretation advocated by Charles Laughton. He believed that an audience's enjoyment

of the oral reader's program was directly related to its ability to remain attentive. "His own method [was] first to present material that [was] simple, brief, and easy to enjoy before leading his audience to an appreciation of the more complex."¹¹ Laughton's theory that the careful arrangement of materials to secure the listeners' interest and enjoyment through the controlled use of duration, that is, by beginning with short, easily understood selections before performing lengthy, more difficult materials, informed Moorehead's programming.

Segments three, five, and seven were transitional passages. In each passage, Moorehead spoke of her own girlhood. This common thread provided Moorehead the opportunities to discuss her favorite things, her mother's house and her family's faith and reliance upon Bible reading. Her comments led to the introduction of a selection.

It was during the performance of these transitional passages that Moorehead, under Laughton's direction, employed the rhetorical device of regression. Moorehead introduced a selection but before performing it she remembered another story from her girlhood. This device appeared intermittently throughout the entire program. It was not accidental. Her regression either set the tone of the selection that followed or elaborated upon the character of the selection's speaker. Furthermore, the device sharpened Moorehead's performance persona in the minds of the audience members.

The effect was that of the garrulous though beguiling raconteur, an opinion held by the majority of her reviewers.

Segment four was a cutting from The Great Lover, a poem by the English poet Rupert Brooke. Brooke's poem contains seventy-six lines of verse. Moorehead recited only twenty-eight of these, beginning with line twenty-six, "These I have loved," through line forty-five and a piecework of individual lines from the following thirteen. This selection was longer than any of the selections she had previously performed.

The sixth segment was longer still than all of those which preceded it. It was, in fact, the longest selection in the first half of the program. The selection was a piece of light prose, a cutting from James Thurber's "Lavender with a Difference." The piece is a biographical sketch of Thurber's mother. It is markedly different in tone from "The Great Lover."

Thurber was one of Moorehead's favorite authors and both of their families were originally from Ohio. He wrote of people and values she respected. Moorehead was one of Thurber's favorite performers, and he allowed her to perform this copyrighted material without paying royalties because he had so much enjoyed her performances with Lionel Barrymore on the radio. It was one of Moorehead's greatest pleasures to repeat the story that Thurber's book sales had increased after her first tour.¹²

Segment seven was a lengthy transitional passage that

introduced segment eight, a comic re-telling of the story of Baby Moses entitled "Moses and the Bullrush." Moorehead wrote the piece,¹³ and the narrator was a black maid, Daphne, whom her parents had employed when Moorehead was a child. The comedy in the tale derived from Daphne's misconstruction of characters and incidents essential to the Bible story and from her speech patterns. Segment nine was an introduction to segment ten, a standard reading of the story of Noah and the Ark.

The topics discussed by Moorehead in her transitional passages began to change with segment ten. Until this passage she had talked only of her girlhood, but after the story of Noah, which her father had read to her, she began to speak of her life in the theatre and motion pictures. These topics brought her to the subject of femme fatales which she had always wanted to play, and femme fatales brought her to Marcel Proust's Mme. Swann.

Mme. Swann, a woman with a famous reputation, is one of the central characters in Proust's Remembrance of Things Past, set in Paris in the 1890's. The passage describes Mme. Swann as she takes an afternoon stroll. Louis Sheaffer, writing in the Brooklyn Eagle, remarked that Moorehead's performance of this section "proved to be a flavoured, charming 'remembrance' of a vanished way of life."¹⁴ It was a comment echoed by many of Moorehead's reviewers.

The first half of the program ended with segment thirteen in which Moorehead declared an interval.

She left the stage and remained off for ten to twenty minutes.

After the intermission, Moorehead returned to the stage. She introduced a new topic of discussion in segment fourteen; her subject for this segment and the five following segments was letters. During segment fourteen, Moorehead announced the performance of a short story by Ring Lardner that was written in the form of a series of letters. However, before she began her Lardner selection, Moorehead read a two-line epistle from Elizabeth I to the Bishop of Ely, written in 1573. The obvious comic tone of this selection prepared the audience for the longer humorous selection of segment sixteen.

Lardner's "Some Like 'Em Cold" is the bittersweet story of an air mail romance between Maybelle Gillespie (Dear Girlie) and Chas. F. Lewis (Dear Mr. Man). It is a one-sided romance, unfortunately, and ends with Lewis' marriage to another woman. This story, the longest selection in Moorehead's program, offered her a considerable opportunity to display her vocal skills through the representation of two distinct voices, one of each sex.

In segment seventeen, Moorehead introduced her relationship with Charles Laughton into her discussion of letters. Moorehead then read a letter by Sir Osbert Sitwell from The Scarlet Tree in the succeeding segment.

In this selection Sitwell recounts his first meeting with young Laughton, in their hometown of Scarbrough, England.

The transitional passage of segment nineteen incorporated an interplay between Moorehead and her stage manager with a continuation of Sitwell's recollection. The stage manager repeatedly attempted to gain Moorehead's attention by calling her from the wings, while she continued to read from Sitwell. Failing to gain her attention, the stage manager walked on stage and dumped the telephone onto the table.

Agnes: And what is that?

Stage Manager: A telephone! (He exited.)

Agnes: Why am I always interrupted by telephones? What is it for?

Stage Manager (off stage): Sorry, Wrong Number.

Sorry, Wrong Number, the radio drama Moorehead made famous, was mentioned in every press release about the production and was given prominent notice on posters and playbills. It was the highlight, or climax, of Moorehead's one-woman show. Lucille Fletcher's script requires a playing time of twenty-three minutes, but Laughton and Moorehead eliminated all lines except those of Mrs. Stevenson; their cutting played approximately fifteen minutes.

It began with a blackout immediately after the Stage Manager's announcement. The pre-recorded voices of the killers was amplified through the housespeakers. The lights were brought up to reveal Moorehead speaking into the

telephone asking for the operator's assistance. By the end of the selection, Moorehead had built the tension of the drama to an appropriate level. She indicated the killer's approach from the wings and the lights were again taken out. The pre-recorded voice of the killer informed the police that they had reached a wrong number.

Moorehead bridged her performance of Sorry, Wrong Number to her next selection with a declaration of her pride in being a performer. Her last selection, segment twenty-two, was a speech by Mother Eve from George Bernard Shaw's Back to Methuselah. The speech was a cutting of two speeches near the end of the first act entitled "In the Beginning: B.C. 4004 (In the Garden of Eden)." In this speech Eve summarizes the various gifts of mankind and extols the virtues of the artists for "when they come, there is always some new wonder, or some new hope: something to live for." When she concluded this speech, Moorehead bade the audience farewell and left the stage.

Moorehead recited "The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver" by Edna St. Vincent Millay as her encore. The poem is a lyric ballad of one hundred and twenty-six lines. The author had refused initially to permit the poem to be read. Millay had written it on the death of her mother and did not want it read "for profit, for the public." Moorehead secured permission to use it after she sent a recording of her interpretation to Millay, who was sufficiently pleased that she relented.¹⁵

The itinerary for Moorehead's first tour listed fifty-four cities, but with pick-up bookings acquired along the way, the final total reached seventy-eight cities.¹⁶ Most of these bookings were one-nighters. The tour began on 30 January 1954, in Salt Lake City, and ended on 19 May in Oakland, California. Moorehead traveled over 10,000 miles from coast to coast and from border to border during this tour. The strength of Moorehead's name enabled the unknown production to draw respectable audiences. In 1956, Moorehead told an interviewer that her tour had drawn as few as 1,800 people and as many as 9,000.¹⁷

The company for That Fabulous Redhead consisted of Moorehead and two others. Kathleen Ellis, Moorehead's close friend and her motion picture stand-in, was hired as dresser and secretary. Ellis' function was more of a factotum who performed many necessary errands. Pat Waltz, a young actor, served as stage manager and company driver. The three traveled by car to all of their destinations. Moorehead could never sleep in a moving automobile and disliked this form of travel, though it was expedient.

Later Tours and Production Changes in Moorehead's One-Woman Program

A complete history of Moorehead's bookings from 1954 until 1972 is impossible to reconstruct, since the necessary documentation is unrecoverable. Touring schedules for

Moorehead's bookings during this nineteen year period are unavailable except for the first tour in 1954 and for the last tour in 1972. Some information for all other years can be obtained from promotional releases which appeared in newspapers and from published interviews and reviews.

The following history is based upon a substantial number of available reference materials, though undoubtedly many more references remain unfound. However, with the available information it is possible to establish the years in which Moorehead toured as well as those in which she did not. More important, it is possible to document the changes in Moorehead's programming over the years.

After her original tour in the spring of 1954, Moorehead toured again in the fall of that year from August until December. The exact number of performances which Moorehead gave during the two tours of 1954 is not ascertainable, but in the early 1960's, Moorehead told an interviewer that she had performed in one hundred and thirty-nine cities¹⁸ during 1954. These cities were located in forty of the forty-eight states that comprised the union at the time.

Moorehead made no tour in 1955 because her film commitments were numerous. She worked on seven films during this year, which were released for distribution in 1956. Moorehead limited her solo performance dates to a few college bookings in 1956. She performed at Pacific Lutheran College on 6 March 1956. This was an evening performance which began at 8:30 p.m. Her summer was spent teaching advanced acting

and oral interpretation at the University of Southern California. Moorehead gave a free public performance of her program at the Bovard auditorium on the USC campus at the end of the term. This performance began at eleven a.m. on 14 August 1956.¹⁹

Moorehead did not tour with her program during the years 1957 through 1959. She was busy with other projects during this period. These projects included a tour in The Rivalry (1957), three film commitments (1958), and a tour in The Pink Jungle (1959).

Moorehead reactivated her reading career in 1960. However, she did not tour under Paul Gregory's management this year but commissioned her old friend Joseph Cotten to produce That Fabulous Redhead on a double bill with Christopher Fry's A Phoenix Too Frequent.²⁰ Cotten directed the one-act play with a three member cast including Richard Grey, May Loizeaux, and Louise Vincent. Charles Laughton received directorial credit for That Fabulous Redhead.

Fry's play opened the bill, followed by a shortened version of Moorehead's program of readings with a playing time of approximately one and a half hours. This shortened version was achieved by re-arranging and deleting selections. The major deletion was Sorry, Wrong Number; it was widely known to Moorehead's audiences and was the most strenuous piece to perform. Moorehead began her program with her usual brief selections of household hints, and they were followed by a "fully acted out reading" of Thurber's "Lavender with a

Difference."²¹ The arrangement of other selections included Millay's "Ballad of the Harp Weaver," "Moses and the Bullrush," the Bible story of the Flood, and Moorehead's selection from Proust. The program ended with Shaw's Back to Methuselah.

This 1960 tour consisted of only two bookings during summer months. The first booking was at the Art Center in La Jolla, California's Sherwood Hall. This engagement was for two weeks, from Friday, 17 June through 2 July. Moorehead and company appeared every night except Monday with an 8:30 p.m. curtain. This engagement was followed by a brief hiatus of three weeks while Moorehead made an episode of a television western. The production opened again for a five-night run at the Wharf Theatre in Monterey, California, on Tuesday, 26 July 1960. The curtain was at 8:30 p.m. Moorehead used her original set pieces for both engagements.

On 12 February 1961, Moorehead appeared in "a historical resume of America" entitled "This Land" at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio. The program offered folk music interspersed with historical anecdotes about the founding and development of the United States from Revolutionary days to the present. Moorehead read the "literate and at times amusing" passages and Joe and Penny Aronson sang while accompanying themselves on the guitar and mandolin. Moorehead performed one musical selection entitled "My Mother was a Lady."²²

Moorehead presented her readings after the intermission.

Her reviewer described her program as "readings with a range of characterizations, dramatic, descriptive, poetic, somewhat after the manner of Charles Laughton."²³ Moorehead performed Sorry, Wrong Number on this occasion.

Moorehead spent the remainder of 1961 touring her shortened version of That Fabulous Redhead, and her bookings were made under Paul Gregory's management. Her solo program was again presented on a double bill with A Phoenix Too Frequent with the same 1960 cast. A complete itinerary of this tour is not available, but Moorehead and company performed as early as 12 July at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb and as late as 18 November at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. The company was in California during September of 1961 and played engagements at commercial theatres and college campuses. On some occasions, Moorehead performed without the one act. For example, she performed in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on 16 and 17 November for the Junior League Curtain Call series.

Although Moorehead did not tour her program in 1962, she did not miss another year until 1972. Moorehead toured in two other productions during this year. She and Joseph Cotten crisscrossed the country during the spring in Prescription for Murder, but the play never reached Broadway. In the summer, she toured with Charles Boyer in Lord Penquo and opened on Broadway on 19 September 1962, for a brief run.

The tour Gregory produced of Moorehead's solo program in 1963 was notable for the location of its bookings. The

entire program was performed in cities in the countries of Egypt, Turkey and Israel. Moorehead toured alone and took nothing with her but her costume; all of her set pieces were provided by the theatres where she performed.²⁴ This tour was presented during the summer and fall of 1963. Her foreign audiences enjoyed the program, Moorehead believed, because people of different cultures still shared the same human experiences. It did not matter if foreign audiences did not understand the "Americanisms" in certain selections "as long as they [got] the drift and spirit of the pieces."²⁵

From 1964 until 1972, Moorehead performed her reading program before a public audience at least once a year. Financial gain had been an important factor in Moorehead's initial tours, but as years passed, professional success brought to her a financial comfort that reduced her desire to tour on a regular basis. During these later years, Moorehead accepted a large number of one-night engagements, though the exact number of performances she gave during this nine-year period is not verifiable.

Moorehead presented her program to college and university audiences. At most college engagements, Moorehead would deliver a lecture on the drama or film in conjunction with her performance. The pattern of her performance-lecture would depend upon the circumstances of any given situation. For example, she would lecture in the afternoon and perform in the evening. Some college visits were for two days, and Moorehead's activities were suitably adjusted. She was paid

for these engagements as a guest lecturer by the college or one of its departments.

Many of her engagements during this period were for charitable organizations. Her friend Joseph Cotten admired Moorehead's willingness to donate her time and talent to what he described as "dreary groups." She traveled great distances when she thought she could help benefit a charity or cause in which she believed. Cotten referred to Moorehead as the "Queen of the Road" because "she was unbelievable in her compassion for others."²⁶

For these college and charitable performances, Moorehead employed properties and set furnishings provided by her sponsors. She provided her costume, substituting for the original chiffon frock a dress she believed suitable for the occasion. Moorehead's only requirement was that her dress be "beautiful."

A number of changes in the program occurred during these years. A significant change concerned the title of the program. Moorehead continued to offer her shortened version of That Fabulous Redhead under the new title Come Closer-I'll Give You an Earful. The first documented use of this title was at Moorehead's appearance at San Jose City College, San Jose, California, on 10 December 1964.²⁷

Moorehead did not use this new title exclusively. Throughout the latter period of her reading career, she often used both titles; at times, she appeared under one of them and at other times under the other. On some occasions, the

title used was An Evening with Agnes Moorehead. The first instance of the use of this title was during the original tour when Moorehead appeared in New York at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.²⁸ However, this title was used infrequently. Reasons for these title changes are not ascertainable, since no reference to them can be located in the available source materials. It is interesting to note that no matter what title was used, Laughton always received directing credit in the program book.

Moorehead changed selections within the program as well during these years. She often substituted the "prophetic devil's speech on destruction" from Shaw's Don Juan In Hell, which "conveyed a timely and chilling denunciation of man's success in producing the arms of death,"²⁹ for Eve's speech from Back to Methuselah by the same author. Moorehead also, on some occasions, ended her performance with Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

Another change in programming was concerned with the transitional speech before "Moses and the Bullrush." As early as 1966, Moorehead no longer introduced the selection by telling her audience she had first heard it as a girl from her colored maid. She described it as having been told to her by her cousin Daphne, a young lady from the South.³⁰ The selection was performed in Southern not Negro dialect. Though Moorehead never explained her reason for this change, it is reasonable to suggest that she was influenced by the mounting opposition by blacks to stereotyping of their race

in the 1960's and was unwilling to make any derogatory remarks about blacks.

An Analysis of Moorehead's Recorded Performances

Moorehead did not record her solo program either on phonographic disc or film. She did record two selections that she performed in her program. These selections are Sorry, Wrong Number and "Nancy Hanks," the poem by Rosemary Benet that Moorehead often performed as an encore selection for the shortened version of her program that she toured in later years.

The extant examples from her program are noteworthy for their variety of mood, genre, and particularly, of characterization. On the other hand, both recorded selections are serious, dramatic pieces, and they do not provide illustrations of Moorehead's mastery of comedy that she believed to be her special talent.

This analysis of Moorehead's performances of "Nancy Hanks" and Sorry, Wrong Number describes the effects she achieved in her performances of them. The discussion offers a brief analysis of the selections with primary attention given to the character of the speaker in each selection. It also examines Moorehead's vocal techniques utilized in her performances of the selections. However, the discussion begins with a description of Moorehead's

normal speech and vocal patterns as a basis for contrast with her character voices.

Agnes Moorehead was reared in the Midwest, and her normal speech patterns reflect her origins. She spoke with the crisp, clear speech of a general American dialect speaker, producing pure vowels and sounding final "r's." Her normal speech was enhanced by years of voice and diction training, and she developed a well-modulated speech pattern sustained by diaphragmic support without a trace of breathiness or mumbling.

Moorehead's normal vocal range was that of a mezzo soprano. Her normal range is best illustrated in the beginning minutes of her recording of Sorry, Wrong Number.³¹ She made this recording during her middle forties, yet her voice sounds surprisingly youthful.

The same recording also illustrates her wide range in the production of sound. During the performance she often leaves the range of the mezzo soprano to enter into the soprano range then, at times, almost immediately dropping into the range of the contralto. This change is especially evident in one section where Moorehead, as Mrs. Stevenson addressing the telephone operator, begins in the mezzo soprano voice and raising into the soprano range during the course of the conversation then descends into the contralto range to deliver "stupid, stupid operator" after hanging up the telephone.

Moorehead's normal speech tempo was moderately paced so

that her sentences were easily understood by her audience. She did vary her tempo in accordance with the appropriateness of her moods and thoughts.

Benet's "Nancy Hanks" is a short dramatic monologue in verse with thirty-two lines divided into four eight-line stanzas. Its minimal plot is conceived upon the idea that Hanks returns to earth as a ghost to ask about her son, Abraham Lincoln. The first five lines of the poem are spoken by a narrative voice who introduces the speaker and her situation. The remaining twenty-seven lines are spoken by Hanks to an unidentified second person or persons. There is no indication in the poem of the time frame in which the speaker returns, except that she mentions that her son was nine the year she died.

The author provides no physical description of Hanks. However, it is obvious from her spoken thoughts that she is a concerned and caring mother who desires to gain some knowledge of the son she left behind. The speaker's use of the English language is indicative of a woman who has some mature knowledge of its grammar and syntax. Of the twenty-seven lines Hanks speaks eleven are in the form of questions and the remaining sixteen form three separate statements about Lincoln as she remembers him. Both the questions and the statements are complete in sentence form and Hanks expresses no elliptical sentences. Furthermore, the speaker's language contains no dialectical speech patterns or idiomatic expressions and there is no dropping of

the final "ing" constructions in such words as "scraping" and "rolling."

The poem is sentimental in tone. This sentimentality is particularly evident in the two middle stanzas that are concerned with Hanks' remembrances of the pioneer son she left in poverty and want. In the final stanza Hanks asks a series of questions about her son. These questions include "Did he grow tall?", "Did he go to town?" and so on. The answers to these questions are known by every schoolchild and they provide an ironic tone that undercuts the sentimentality of the poem.

Moorehead's performance of the piece illustrates her understanding of Hanks' situation and also the love she felt for her son. Moorehead establishes Hanks' character as less than sophisticated by employing a nasal twang that makes the character sound "countrified." This development of characterization through vocalization adds depth to the reading by offsetting the poem's correctly structured grammar. Furthermore, Moorehead diphthongizes a number of her vowels such as the "a" in "hard" to further develop Hanks' speech and characterization.

Moorehead is careful not to overplay the sentimental tone. She delivers the lines with a slow tempo that helps to bring out the meanings of the lines, but her pace is not so slow that the reading becomes moribund.

Moorehead skillfully handles the final stanza with its series of questions in a manner that emphasizes the irony of

the lines and that counterbalances the sentimentality of the preceding stanzas. Moorehead delivers the first two lines of the final stanza ("You wouldn't know/about my son?") as a statement not as a question. This reading not only enhances the irony of the lines but helps to perpetuate Moorehead's characterization of Hanks as a modest, unassuming woman who is unaware of the greatness that was bestowed upon her son.

Moorehead's performance of "Nancy Hanks" is effective. She provides an interesting characterization that is not evident from any stylistic, literary or historical allusions found in the poem. Moorehead chose to illustrate the character of Hanks by employing a wispy, breathy vocal quality that produces a haunting, ethereal effect that is entirely appropriate for the character of a ghost. This vocal quality also sharpens the feelings of sadness and longing that Moorehead chose to display in the character of the speaker.

Though Moorehead expertly handles the rhyming pattern in the poem (ABCBDEFE) by making it apparent but not obtrusive, Moorehead often allows the cadence of the meter to distract from the meaning of the lines. In point of fact, her delivery of the meter borders on sing-song and produces an amusing effect that is not appropriate to the poem.

On the whole, Moorehead's performance of "Nancy Hanks" is distinguished for its excellence of characterization, but it is lacking in its understanding of prosody. It can be argued that Moorehead was aware of her limitations as a

performer of metered verse, and it was for this reason that her solo program contained only two examples of this genre.

Moorehead's performance of Mrs. Albert Stevenson in Sorry, Wrong Number is an interesting contrast to her performance of Hanks in Benet's poem. Sorry, Wrong Number, written by Lucille Fletcher, is a story of a woman's attempts to notify the authorities of an impending murder. Mrs. Stevenson, who is a bed-ridden invalid, accidentally overhears a plot to murder a woman when her telephone connection becomes crossed with that of the killers. As the story unfolds, it becomes apparent to the audience that the intended victim is in fact Mrs. Stevenson. The clues to the victim's identity are provided by Mrs. Stevenson, who fails to comprehend until it is too late that the situation of the victim is her own.

Near the end of the drama the audience discovers that Mrs. Stevenson's husband has hired a killer to dispatch her. The author does not provide clues to the reasons for Mr. Stevenson's action. The lack of a specific motive for murder provides ambiguity to the drama. Moorehead's performance of Mrs. Stevenson offers answers for the question for murder.

Moorehead characterizes Mrs. Stevenson as a querulous, self-centered woman, whose personality would alienate her from most people. It is to Moorehead's credit that her portrayal also displays an underlying vulnerability. Mrs. Stevenson, as played by Moorehead, strikes a sympathetic response from her audience for a woman in such dire

circumstances while she simultaneously reveals the reason for her destruction.

Moorehead's portrayal of Mrs. Stevenson is a virtuoso performance. Using only her voice, the actress represents the character's many emotional states with just the right vocal technique. Mrs. Stevenson's vocal quality is pleasantly modulated at the beginning of the performance as she attempts to charm the operator into doing her bidding. Moorehead projects Mrs. Stevenson's shock and horror at overhearing a plan for murder by a rapid pace, a stuttered delivery, and a grasping, breathy vocal quality. When her attempts to alert the authorities meet with failure, Mrs. Stevenson's voice becomes strident as she shrewishly dismisses the police. The poor woman is in a state of terror by the end of the piece as she realizes that the killer is coming up the stairs for her; her speech becomes hysterically frantic. Moorehead illustrates the character's terror by speaking in a whispered voice which deteriorates into incoherent mumbling, and finally a piercing scream.

It is doubtful that Moorehead had very much difficulty in vocally depicting the many various characters that appear in the selections of her solo program. She was an adroit mimic who possessed a good ear for accentual, dialectical, and idiosyncratic speech patterns. She often amused her friends in Hollywood by imitating other actresses in the film industry. More important, Moorehead's versatility in voice

and diction made it possible for her to play the varied roles in which she appeared in film and on the stage.

Moorehead was also a master of characterization. She had the training and ability to take a character and to provide it with a sub-text that was not necessarily apparent at first reading. Her portrayals of Hanks and Stevenson display women with genuine personalities and sincere emotions. Moorehead was guided by the clues the works provided in the development of her characterizations and she did not add subtextual meanings that could not be supported by the situations and motivations inherent in the pieces.

Review of Critical Comments

Moorehead performed her program intermittently for sixteen years, appearing in over four hundred performances.³⁴ The purpose of this section is to examine the published critical comments written about the program. Specifically, this section will summarize the critics' evaluations of the script and Moorehead's performance.

A search for critical reviews was conducted in preparation for the writing of this section. Most of these reviews were found in the scrapbooks compiled and maintained by Moorehead. She collected many of her reviews throughout the years, and this is especially true of the reviews of the

first tour. Other reviews were obtained from various library and newspaper archives.

The reviews assembled and analyzed data from 1954 to 1969 and total forty-six. This number is small in comparison to the total number of performances given by Moorehead. However, the reviews contain reactions to the same selections, though they were published in diverse geographical locations over a considerable period of time. Furthermore, analytical study reveals discernable trends of evaluation and consensus of opinion. For these reasons, the reviews can be considered as representative.

The critics cited in this section are divided into two groups, professional and non-professional. Professional critics are defined here as those reviewers who made a living through the publication of their criticisms of artistic events. They are writers whose articles appear in newspapers under their own by-lines and who are billed as drama critics or entertainment/amusement editors. The nonprofessional critics are those who fall outside the scope of the professional critics. They include general staff writers for newspapers, student reporters, Moorehead's fans, and her friends. The use of a reviewer's full-name specifies a professional unless otherwise designated as a nonprofessional critic.

Of the forty-six reviews available for analysis and discussion, forty-four are classified as complimentary. The remaining two are uncomplimentary. The terms "complimentary"

and "uncomplimentary" refer to judgements of the general effectiveness and quality of the program. Specific citations of praise and blame appear in reviews of both types. However, the complimentary reviews retain a perspective of objectivity that is not found in their opposition. Each of the two uncomplimentary reviews reveals a personal bias on the part of the reviewers. Both reviews were written by professional critics. The favorable ones were all unbiased. A complimentary review is defined as an article sympathetic to Moorehead that judged her program to be an artistic success.

Wood Soames, writing for the Oakland, California, Tribune, reviewed the final performance of the first tour. Soames has little to say about the performance of the selections but much to say about the programming of the selections. He faults Moorehead for her choices, which he believes to be "comprehensive" in range but based on "wretched advice." This advice he credits to Laughton. He did not enjoy the selections with the exception of selection number one that consisted of the five short selections, and Sorry, Wrong Number. Soames found fault with every selection. For example, he thought Thurber's "Lavender with a Difference" to be "long-winded and quite unfunny." However, Soames failed to specify if it was the selection or the performance of it that brought him to this conclusion. He found "Moses and the Bullrush" to be "in questionable taste." His comment on this selection is also equivocal,

since Soames does not state whether the question of taste arises from a tale told in "Negro dialect" or from an objection to the burlesque treatment given to the familiar story. The remainder of his comments consists of a catalogue of dry, summary dismissals: "a tedious Proust essay," "a long-winded reading of Ring Lardner's 'Some Like 'Em Cold'," and "Shaw's 'Back to Methuseleh' was pretty painful."

Soames states his bias against "readings" in no uncertain terms. He writes:

From where this reviewer sat, however, the Moorehead show was just another one of those things that have cropped up since Charles Laughton began his "readings" and it is to be hoped that this is the end of the one-man and one-woman shows.

In his opinion, Moorehead's program was not in the same league as that of Ruth Draper with her "sketches" and Cornelia Otis Skinner with her complete plays (monologue-dramas). He obviously desired a sustained narrative with rising action and denouement. He wanted all the elements found in a play, like Skinner's Paris '90. Soames does admit that his review "might well be a minority report. . . . As I was fleeing from the theatre a female voice was yelling 'Bravo.' Perhaps others joined in the outcry."³⁵

Moorehead appeared as part of the dramatic portion of the 1963 Israel Festival. One review for this performance was not complimentary. Writing in the Jerusalem Post, Mendel Kohansky, admitting that he always thought of Moorehead as a

"thoroughly accomplished, polished, highly professional actress," was pleased by her performance skills especially those of body and voice. He also notes Moorehead's dramatic reputation but reports that she "shone in comedy numbers." In the end, however, Kohansky found the program only "mildly rewarding."

Kohansky disliked Moorehead's performance of many of the same selections which Soames had faulted almost ten years earlier. These included Eve's speech from "Back to Methuselah," which in Kohansky's view "lacked the intellectual sharpness needed to bring out the brilliance and the inner contradiction of the argument," as well as the Proust selection, which he found to be "foreign to the spirit of the author and to the times about which he wrote." However, Kohansky did enjoy the Thurber story, which he believed to have "the ring of authenticity and the right blend of humor and sentiment."³⁶

But unlike Soames, Kohansky did not object to the concept of oral reading; his objection was to the performer. He believed Moorehead lacked "the dramatic power, the intellectual brilliance, the captivating charm-stuff of which great performances are made."³⁷

Kohansky blames the management of the Festival for booking lesser talents for "the drama part of the event" than those booked for the musical events. He writes:

And while the music features local composers, soloists, ensembles and conductors, the drama part is innocent of local theatre. Save for the handicap of

speaking Hebrew, there are at least five performers in Israel who could deliver as good an evening of reading as Agnes Moorehead. . . .³⁸

Though Kohansky's review does not contain a strict bias against non-Israeli performers, since he had enjoyed Sir John Gielgud in The Ages of Man the previous year, he is distinctly nationalistic in his preference.³⁹

Both Kohansky and Soames believed Moorehead's programming to be poorly conceived and detrimental to the success of the production. The judgment that Moorehead's script was weak is held by four of her complimentary reviewers as well. Those who hold this belief are, like Soames and Kohansky, professional critics. However, the agreement between the two types of reviewers does not extend to the judgment upon the general effectiveness of the show.

The reviewers who took exception to Moorehead's script did so for aesthetic reasons. They found in it an absence of forward movement toward an obtainable goal. For them, there was no consistent pattern in the arrangement of selections with each selection building upon what had come before it. The program did not increase the audiences' appreciation of literature, expand their world view, or raise their consciousness about a given topic.

Bruno Ussher describes the effect of the unevenness discernable in Moorehead's programming. He writes:

That a program of dramatic readings is apt to have its lower as well as higher levels of effectiveness is unavoidable in this medium of theatrical expression. Some of it was just airy story telling.⁴⁰

Ussher's conclusion that the program was in part more than story telling was certainly true of Moorehead's transitional materials.

It is this author's belief that the program lacked cohesiveness and its ultimate weakness lay in the diversity of the selections. Moorehead's program did not focus on one or two individual authors, works of literature or literary forms. Similarly, the selections did not concentrate upon a general theme or topic such as beauty, love or death and thereby failed to provide opportunities to compare and contrast the thought, tone and sentiment expressed by one or more authors upon a given topic. It was, in fact, the same type of programming Laughton created for himself.

It is this writer's opinion that Moorehead's program supplied middle brow fare in terms of its selections. The pieces which Moorehead performed seem to have been chosen to appeal to a large mass audience that represented various levels of education and/or literary refinement. Furthermore, the selections are highly emotive in their appeal and offer few passages that are stimulating to the intellect. This is a viewpoint with which critic Ewing Poteet would agree. He writes:

It is not that Miss Moorehead's material was bad. On the contrary, it had, every bit of it, a high entertainment content. But with the rarest exceptions, lightness was the keynote. Miss Moorehead was out purely to entertain, not to

stimulate or instruct. From that point of view it could perhaps be said that her material was extraordinarily strong. That is, she, or her writers, had arranged it with a remarkably knowing eye to timing to contrast and, for the most part, to cumulative effect.⁴¹

Laughton, a master of the rhetoric of performance, was as adept at selecting and adapting literary materials into reading programs as he was at enhancing the performer's effectiveness through the staging of a reading. Laughton worked to create for Moorehead a great "personal triumph." Using the knowledge gained through study and performance, he and Moorehead selected materials that displayed a high entertainment quality, a quality that was enhanced by Moorehead's performance of them. "But it [was] not Laughton's show adapted to Miss Moorehead. It [was] hers, tailored by her with Laughton's suggestions, fitting her personalities and attractivenesses as thoroughly as her gown."⁴² The selections were subservient to Moorehead and were arranged to focus the audience members' attention upon the performer and her talents.

It is the author's belief that the ultimate effect of the program was that of a great performer performing. Moorehead's performance abilities as an oral reader lay in two specific areas. The first was her versatility in the use of her physical being. She began her performance training in her early years as a dancer and this training remained with her. Moorehead's poise, gracefulness, and dexterity were

evident throughout her performance. Even Kohansky praised her "perfect coordination" of face and body.

More important, Moorehead's use of her face and body enlarged for the audience the effect of every selection she performed; "at times the gestures and inflections were secondary in effect gained to [sic] the quizzical quirk of an eyebrow, or elfin grin or a little girl pout."⁴³ Everything Moorehead did on stage was studied but nonetheless effective. Even playing to a packed house in large auditoriums the "nuances of feeling conveyed by facial expressions and the merest shrugs told as nothing else could the degree of artistry [Moorehead] possessed."⁴⁴

Moorehead also received commendations for her versatile use of her voice. The combination of training as a singer, the years spent as a radio actress and her natural gifts as a mimic provided Moorehead with a rich melodious voice noted for its beauty. She pleased audiences with her vocal characterizations that were always appropriate and well defined.⁴⁵ She represented numerous emotional states according to the dictates of the script and produced voices that clearly differentiated between social classes, races, ages, nationalities and sexes. Moorehead's voice "was pleasantly modulated at all times, yet [it] was a penetrating foil--flexible and dangerous by turns."⁴⁶

If one thing above all others was responsible for Moorehead's success with her program, it was her ability to re-create herself before an audience. Moorehead referred to

her show as a drama, not as an oral reading.⁴⁷ She called herself a "storyteller" in the tradition of the Greek rhapsodes who performed at public gatherings.⁴⁸ Moorehead, the storyteller, who invited the audience to share stories with her in her living room on the stage was distinguishable from Moorehead, the woman.

The effort that had gone into confecting an impression of casualness, of informality, of spontaneity had been beautifully concealed. Miss Moorehead gave every appearance of being simply a gracious hostess chatting with her guests and entertaining them with whatever happened to come into her mind at the moment.⁴⁹

This storyteller was a specific character, or performance persona, who performed a specific action in a specific place. In this respect, Moorehead re-created herself in performance presenting "an assured, attractive personality"⁵⁰ distilled from its creator's finer traits. Moorehead presented a charming⁵¹ prescence on stage that "dominated an audience by sheer force of personality". . .

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Summary

Agnes Moorehead, under the direction of Charles Laughton, created a solo reading program of selected works of classical and contemporary literature. The selections were primarily examples of prose fiction but the program also contained selections of poetry and drama.

Moorehead began her first tour of That Fabulous Redhead in 1954, and performed the program intermittently for nearly twenty years. In later years, the program was shortened and substitutions were made in the selections and transitional materials. The title was also changed.

Moorehead received, for the most part, favorable notices for her performances. Her critics generally agreed that she was a master of voice and diction and that her physical gestures enhanced the interpretations of her selections. Furthermore, the performance persona that she displayed during the transitional passages helped to create a rapport between Moorehead and her audiences.

Endnotes

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³Stanley Progar, "Fabulous Rehead Shows Flashes of Fire in Stopover Interview," Stockton (CA) Record, 23 April 1954, n. p.

⁴Virgil Miers, "Evening of Agnes Is a Grand Treat," (Dallas) Daily Times Herald, 6 April 1954, sec 2, p. 4.

⁵Eric Atkins, "Memory, 'Pink' Charm Spark Moorehead Shows," St. Petersburg (Fla) Times, 4 December 1967, p.9-D.

⁶Ibid.

⁷"Moorehead to Repeat 'Sorry, Wrong Number' on Gab Circuit," Variety, 8 July 1953, p. 65.

⁸The unused materials along with Laughton's comments are contained in the Agnes Moorehead Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Box 60, Folder 14.

⁹"No. 1 Movie Mother, That's Miss Moorehead," Louisville, KY., Courier Journal 23 February 1956, section 1, n. p.

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¹³Charles Hurley, "Agnes Moorehead Scores in Fresno Bare Stage Program," Fresno (CA) Bee, 23 April 1954, n. p.

¹⁴Louis Sheaffer, "Agnes Moorehead Gives an Enjoyable Solo Show," Brooklyn (NY) Eagle, 15 March 1954, n. p.

¹⁵George Perry, "Agnes On the Stage," Agnes Moorehead Fan Club Scrapbook, Item #3, in the Agnes Moorehead Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI., January 1972, p. 4.

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¹⁸Regina O'Connell, "Voice of Drama: Agnes Moorehead at Sherwood Hall," San Diego (CA) Union, 26 June 1960, n. p.

¹⁹Moorehead In Readings," Hollywood Reporter, 10 August 1956, n. p.

²⁰Warren Sherk, Agnes Moorehead: A Very Private Person, (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Co., 1976), p. 60.

²¹Virginia Shaw, "Agnes Moorehead Gives Fascinating Performance At Wharf on Same Bill with Fry's 'A Phoenix Too Frequent,'" unidentified newspaper clipping in Agnes Moorehead Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI., 28 July 1960, n.p.

²²Harlowe R. Hoyt, "Moorehead and Duo Give Novel Recital," Cleveland (OH) Plain Dealer, 13 February 1961, n. p.

²³Ibid.

²⁴"Audiences the Same All Over," Jerusalem Post, 2 August 1963, n. p.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Sherk, Agnes Moorehead, pp. 59-60.

²⁷Gloria Tully, "Actress," San Jose (CA) Mercury, 11 December 1964, n. p.

²⁸Louis Sheaffer, "Agnes Moorehead Gives An Enjoyable Solo Show," Brooklyn (NY) Eagle, 15 March 1954, p. 4.

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³⁰"Moorehead Potpourri Captivating at Cal Tech," Los Angeles Times, 15 March 1966, n. p.

³¹"Sorry, Wrong Number," by Lucille Fletcher, (Phonodisc), Decca Records, DL9062, (1958).

³²"Don Juan In Hell," (Phonodisc), Columbia Records, OSL - 166, (OL 4611-OL4612), n. d.

³³"Abraham Lincoln," (Phonodisc), Decca Records, DL 5815, n. p. See also "Famous Poems That Tell Great Stories," (Phonodisc), Decca Records, DL9040, (195-).

³⁴James Robert Parish, Good Dames, (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1974), footnote, p. 107.

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³⁶Mendel Kohansky, "The Undramatic Festival," Jerusalem Post, 2 August 1963, n. p.

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³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Bruno Ussher, "Agnes Moorehead Reveals Beauty, Skill in Reading," San Diego (CA) Evening Tribune, 30 April 1954, p. A-19.

⁴¹Ewing Poteet, "Agnes Moorehead in Solo Program," New Orleans Item, 7 March 1954, p. 35.

⁴²John Fay, "Moorehead Show Great; But Audience is Small," Mobile (AL) Register, 9 March 1954, p. 4-A.

⁴³Ralph Green, "Fine Evening of Moorehead at Coliseum," Sioux Falls (SD) Daily Argus-Leader, 3 February 1954, n. p.

⁴⁴"Agnes Moorehead Wows Audience in LSU Show," Baton Rouge State Times, 15 April 1954, n. p.

⁴⁵Ed Brooks, "Miss Moorehead Delights Crowd," New Orleans Times-Picayune, 6 March 1954, n. p.

⁴⁶Green, "Fine Evening of Moorehead at Coliseum." n. p.

⁴⁷Charley Hurley, "Agnes Moorehead Scores in Fresno Bare Stage Program," Fresno (CA) Bee, 23 April 1954, n. p.

⁴⁸"Moorehead Appearance Enthralls Crowd at Hill," Ann Arbor (MI) Michigan Daily, 25 March 1954, n. p.

⁴⁹Ewing Poteet, "Agnes Moorehead in Solo Program," p. 35.

⁵⁰Louis Sheaffer, "Agnes Moorehead Gives An Enjoyable Solo Show," Brooklyn Eagle, 15 March 1954, p. 4.

⁵¹Melvin Bennett, "'Redhead' Plays Well for Few," Stockton (CA) Record, 26 April 1954, n. p.

⁵²Louis Sheaffer, "Agnes Moorehead Gives An Enjoyable Solo Show," Brooklyn Eagle, p. 4.

Chapter IV

Moorehead's Theory of Performance

Agnes Moorehead attained the status of a respected senior player in her profession during the mid-1950's. She took advantage of her status to express her views about the purpose of the theatre and the nature of performance. Moorehead stated her views in interviews she gave after 1955. Previously, her interviews had been confined to publicity about current projects. The interviews she gave during the remaining nineteen years of her life, though ostensibly for the same purpose, also contain candid comments about the theatre and the nature of performance. The ideas she expressed appeared as random and incidental statements at first. However, as the years passed, her ideas began to appear more frequently and to reveal a systemization of thought.

By the 1960's, Moorehead had codified her ideas about performance. Her ideas were used as the basis of her lectures that she gave in conjunction with her one-woman program at colleges and universities. Whether Moorehead devised a new lecture for each of her engagements is not ascertainable. The ideas discussed in this chapter are taken

from two extant lectures preserved in her personal papers, which she left to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Supplemental information is provided by newspaper interviews. These resources make it possible to establish a description and analysis of Moorehead's theory.

This chapter is divided into six sections. Moorehead was known primarily as an actress of film and stage. She did receive training in the art of interpretation as well as in acting, and section one of this chapter begins with an examination of the pedagogical influence on Moorehead's art of interpretation. The second section is a discussion of Moorehead's beliefs about the nature and purpose of playwriting. Though Moorehead phrased her ideas in terms of the theatre, her ideas are applicable to oral performance or readers theatre as well.

Section three focuses on Moorehead's thoughts about the performer. An analysis of her theory of performance is contained in section four. The fifth section offers an overview of the theoretical approaches adopted by the authors of college textbooks during the period in which Moorehead toured her solo program. A comparison of Moorehead's theory of performance to those found in the college texts is provided in the final section.

Pedagogical Influence on Moorehead's
Art of Interpretation

Information about Moorehead's participation in speech and theatrical activities as a high school student is not available, nor is information about any particular courses in public reading she might have had during these years. However, the history of Moorehead's education in the oral performance of literature is less obscure in the years following her college matriculation.

Moorehead entered Muskingum College in New Concord, Ohio, in 1919. She chose biology as her major, but she also enrolled in six courses in the Department of Oratory and School of Expression. These courses included two classes in public speaking, junior play, senior play, and two courses in interpretative reading.

Moorehead's classes in interpretative reading were an introductory course and an advanced course. The first course was a prerequisite for the second. Both courses were taught by Ferne Parsons Layton, who was a graduate of Otterbein College, Westernville, Ohio.

Layton and her husband, Charles Rush Layton, began their teaching careers at Muskingum College in 1914. "Shortly after their arrival at Muskingum College, they set for themselves the task of creating a Department of Speech that would be academically sound and intellectually stimulating. Thus they took care to disassociate their discipline with what [was] commonly regarded as 'elocutionism'."¹

The Laytons were generalists in the teaching of speech. They believed that an education in speech meant a knowledge

of all areas of the communicative arts from forensics and debate to theatre and interpretation. The Laytons were devoted "to excellence in scholarship and performance."²

Mrs. Layton was a disciple of the Natural School of Interpretation. The Natural School developed during the last half of the nineteenth century and was opposed to the Mechanical School, which emphasized set rules for vocal and physical delivery. The Natural School, highly influenced by the discipline of psychology, taught that a sound interpretation of a literary work was guided by the interpreter's mental and emotional responses to it.

Mrs. Layton introduced the study of vocal and physical delivery in her course, but she maintained that "naturalness, ease. . .[and] putting the subject ahead and speaker behind were the hallmarks that distinguished a good interpretation of literature."³ She also counseled her students not to imitate other oral performers but "to be themselves at their best."⁴

Moorehead continued her training in oral interpretation at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City. The AADA was founded by Franklin Sargent near the end of the nineteenth century. Sargent was a student of Steele Mackaye, who was the leading American disciple of Francois Delsarte. Delsarte, a Frenchman, developed an elaborate system of physical gestures designed to express the variety of intellectual and emotional states needed by the interpreter to convey the meanings of literary works.

Delsarte was a teacher who developed his method of performance based upon the principle of the Trinity. He believed that every physical element in the universe can be divided into three components. For example, a human being is composed of body, mind and soul.

Teachers of elocution in nineteenth century America transformed Delsarte's method for the performance of pantomime into a codified system of movement and gestures for conveying emotional and intellectual states during the performance of a work of literature.

Much of the work which is popularly known as Delsarte in this country is an absolute perversion, or at least, does not faithfully represent the work of the master. It represents the mechanical, the weak side of the work more than the strong side.⁵

American teachers of elocution employed Delsarte's method to construct a system that placed emphasis upon the performer with little emphasis upon the text. "The mind of the performer was centered upon manner, rather than upon matter; upon the means and not upon the substance; upon effect, and not upon the cause."⁶

A reaction against the excess of the Mechanical School began in the late nineteenth century. Samuel Silas Curry was a member of the Natural School; his slogan to his students was "think-the-thought." Curry had been a student of the Delsarte system, but he rejected it "as artificial, based as it was on the inflexible concept of a trinity rather than upon nature."⁷ Moorehead's courses in vocal expression at

the AADA were taught by Bennie Gunnison, who had been a pupil of Curry.⁸

Curry taught his students that the oral interpretation of literature begins with the reader's understanding in his mind of the literary work. Thus the reader must constantly study the literature to be read, and once this study was complete, the result was a delivery that expressed this understanding.

Curry urged his students to develop a delivery that evidenced, or manifested, an understanding with the mind of a work of literature which was then transferred through the body to the appendages in the form of gestures. Curry labeled this form of delivery as "manifestation" as opposed to the "representation" system of the Mechanical School. Curry argued that representation in art belonged to the plastic arts such as painting and sculpture while manifestation belonged to the interpretational arts of pantomime, acting and oral reading. "Representation is more rational, and can symbolize ideas; manifestation is more emotional, and can reveal states of feeling."⁹ Curry's system relied upon the expression of literature from inside the mind outward through the body. "Primarily, Curry's theory attempted to correct the exhibitionistic abuses of elocutionists (i.e., Mechanical School) by concentrating upon the mind's role in expression."¹⁰

In his courses at the AADA, Gunnison taught from Curry's textbook The Foundations of Expression.¹¹ Gunnison described

Curry as the "greatest influential figure in his Public Speech Field." Gunnison referred to the mind as soul and insisted that "Art in general contains two elements--soul and body." He maintained that vocal expression was a science and "Every science analyzes the thought."

Gunnison divided the art of expression into three types: 1. verbal (based on logic), 2. vocal (the production of sounds), and 3. pantomimic (bodily action). Furthermore, he categorized the principles of expression as a. spontaneity ("within the mind-outward through the body"); b. thinking ("mind is the center of all activity"); c. technique; d. criticism; and e. art ("a study of all art helps the artist in a particular field").

Gunnison was opposed to imitation as representation, a term coined by Curry, who did not use it in the same sense as Gunnison.¹² Gunnison taught the techniques of vocal and bodily action in his courses, but he challenged his students to express their understanding of a piece of literature through manifestation. At the same time, he cautioned them that "manifestation rising to a great point of intensity may result in representation."¹³

A discussion of the pedagogical influences upon Moorehead's art of oral interpretation must include the influence of Charles Laughton. Moorehead spent twenty years as a radio actress before she began her professional association with Laughton, but it was Laughton who most influenced her programming and technique that she displayed

in her one-woman show. Moorehead relied heavily upon his opinions and skills.

Laughton was a student of Alice Gachet at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. "She was to be a decisive influence on Laughton's entire career. Alice Gachet laid the foundation for his art and technique." However, Gachet was concerned with the techniques needed by the actor on the stage; Laughton's skills as an oral reader were enhanced by his classes with Gachet.

There is no available information that suggests that Laughton attended classes in oral interpretation. The two biographies written about his life make no mention of this activity. Both biographies as well as the autobiography written by his wife, Elsa Lanchester, indicate that his knowledge of oral interpretation was self-taught. Laughton's instructions were simple: Learn by doing. He read aloud constantly and used his spare time to teach himself the techniques he needed.

Lanchester states that he would often read aloud to her in order to "try out" his materials.¹⁴ It was through discussion with his wife that Laughton gained insight about his progress as a reader. He discussed the pieces he read to the injured personnel at military hospitals after a performance to learn if he had succeeded in conveying the message of the work. Laughton also employed this discussion technique with his students in the private classes he taught in his home.

Laughton prescribed two rules for the novice reader.

The first was to practice reading to others. He said:

I plead for more reading aloud. It is a friendly, quiet and thoroughly refreshing thing to do. It makes us participants rather than spectators. Instead of sitting by to let the professionals answer or enlighten us, we can get into the act, make contact with new ideas, exercise our imaginations.¹⁵

Laughton insisted that reading aloud was only half of the learning process. He maintained that a reader cannot become proficient without discussing with his listeners their responses to his performance. Discussion, Laughton's second rule, not only helped the reader to learn from his mistakes but made the reading process a "shared experience which draws people closer together."¹⁶

For Laughton, the mental stimulation of both reader and listener was the objective of any oral performance. He said, "You've shared the reading, now share the ideas that come from it."¹⁷ Laughton believed that through the method of reading and discussion the reader learns to develop and improve his art.

Laughton employed this method of reading and discussion as a rehearsal method before beginning his tours. Paul Gregory acted as his audience during rehearsals, and together they worked to improve the performance of his selections.¹⁸ A record of the rehearsal method that Laughton employed with Moorehead for her one-woman show has not been discovered; however, this writer speculates that the method Laughton used to rehearse his successful program was also used during the

rehearsals for Moorehead's show, with Laughton as Moorehead's audience.

Nature and Purpose of the Theatre

Moorehead saw tremendous changes occur in the American theatre during the latter years of her career. - Absurdist theatre spread from Europe in the 1950's to become a part of the American playwright's philosophy and technique in the 1960's. The theatre was radically influenced by the theatre of confrontation spawned by the social and political upheavals of the 1960's. The art of acting of the previous period with its reliance upon technique, the graceful gesture and the polished speech, was upstaged by the American method of acting, which adhered to the tenets of naturalism.

These changes had a profound effect upon the American theatre. The structured play in three acts began to disappear, replaced by the episodic two act play. Subject matters such as homosexuality, which had not been held to be appropriate for the stage, became an accepted element in many productions. As these elements were blended together, they produced a theatre that was vibrant, eclectic and shocking.

Moorehead's position on the theatre was that of a traditionalist. She lamented the changes that took place in society and in the theatre in the 1960's. Moorehead came of age in a time when American society was conservative, a time when standards of decency and proper behavior were rigorously

upheld. The questioning of authority, whether in political, religious or artistic circles, greatly disturbed her.

Moorehead foresaw disaster for both the theatre and society when writers began to demonstrate the new radical values in their works. She described these authors as products of their time:

We don't have the theatre we used to have because there are very few effective writers for the stage. It's an entirely different era we're living in--a mechanical, scientific era, and dramaturgy suffers in this world. I think you have to have a great contentment and love of doing something . . . and peace . . . to meditate when you're writing as well as creating in the theatre. Everybody's in a jet . . . they have jet minds.¹⁹

She repeatedly applied the adjective "neurotic" to the writers of the sixties.

Moorehead was an idealist who believed that the act of performance was a tool that must be used to uplift an audience and fortify the human spirit. A production which offered to the public profanity, nudity, simulated sex and violence was not art. It was pornography. She thought the use of such elements highly detrimental to society. She stated that "The effect of all this on people's minds can only be to coarsen and deaden their sensitivities."²⁰ Moorehead anticipated a future theatre that was "ugly, sordid, blasphemous,"²¹ a theatre which "stilled" the public's thinking.²² In her view, the effect of such a theatre produced chaos in all areas of human endeavor. Moorehead maintained that a healing theatre, that is, a

theatre which produced plays with decent moral values, promoted a productive society.

Moorehead was neither a prude nor an advocate of censorship. Her remarks on sex in the theatre delineate her stance:

It is certainly to be wished that decency should be observed on all public occasions, and especially on the stage; but even in this it is possible to go to [sic] far. The determination to tolerate nothing which has the least reference to the sensual relation between the sexes may be carried to a pitch extremely oppressive to a dramatic poet and highly prejudicial to the boldness and freedom of his compositions.²³

Moorehead encouraged restraint. It is far better for an author not to reveal every incidental but merely to indicate actions and relationships, she believed.

Moorehead's encouragement of restraint in artistic endeavors applied to the art of acting as much as it did to the art of playwriting. Her demand for restraint by the actor was a result of her personal belief that in the art of acting there existed a dichotomy between the styles of realism and naturalism. For Moorehead, realism attempted to achieve an actual representation of life on the stage in every detail whether it be physical, intellectual or emotional. Naturalism, on the other hand, was a more selective style. Naturalism, though based upon actuality, represented only the essential elements from real life necessary for the presentation of the drama.

Moorehead believed realism to be dull and unimaginative.

It was ultimately false because it was ultimately impossible to achieve on stage. In her words, realism

. . . is not idealistic, and it has no color. The people on the stage are not going around as they do in real life. They are wearing make up, and they are projecting; they are creating. They are playing out a charade.

If you have a photograph, that is 'realism.' But if you have a painting of the country, or a still life of some fruit, the artist has heightened his colors, and highlighted the salient points with a 'naturalism' that brings home to the eye of the beholder that which responds to his imagination.

That's what theatre is.²⁴

Moorehead maintained that naturalism was by far the best style of acting because it allowed the audience member to participate in the act of creation through the use of his imagination. For example, the role of a blind person requires the actor to indicate blindness through the use of movements and body position. It is left to each audience member to imagine for himself or herself what a state of blindness is like.

Moorehead maintained that a performance was a collaborative process among the author, the performer and the audience member. In her view, it is the author's responsibility to create a story that involves, that is, captures, the audience member's imagination.²⁵ The performer is a translator²⁶ who "takes the cues and clues that the author put in [the text and] makes it come to life. . . ."²⁷ However, the performance does not stop with the performer's physical translation. Moorehead believed that the performance takes place in the spectator's, mind since a

"person's imagination is a far greater playing area than the stage or movies. . . ."28 For Moorehead, the performance is not complete until the audience member views the performer's physical translation of the author's text and makes it real, or manifest, in his imagination.

Moorehead described the theatre as a "living power [that] should be used for good and not evil."29 She maintained that there existed a greater evil than the use of graphic language and actions. She believed that literature and plays which offered a dark vision of reality and characters unable to overcome their despair were unacceptable. Moorehead called them unsatisfactory because they left their audience with a feeling that there was "no hope" for man.30

Moorehead was convinced that a spectator should leave a performance with greater sense of well-being about himself and the world than when the spectator entered. She compared theatrical artists to great evangelists31 whose tasks were to help humanize society.32 She maintained that if artists could not "contribute something good, something imaginative, . . . to make the audience listen, think and get some sort of spiritual release, then what [was] the use of bothering?"33

Moorehead's belief that the theatre should be intellectually stimulating did not mean that she placed the value of entertainment below the value of instruction. She cautioned playwrights: "The responsibility to entertain is of primary importance. That's the way the business began and

that's precisely why it persists, and that is what we must never forget."³⁴ What playwrights did forget was how to achieve this effect, Moorehead thought.

Moorehead believed that too many playwrights relied upon spectacle to entertain their audience. She insisted that a truly entertaining play told a good story, and that a good story had a beginning, a middle and an end.³⁵ Entertaining plays and entertaining literature have complete, coherent structures. They entertain because they provided plot structure, which in turn provided the audience with aesthetic pleasure. Moorehead believed that "Everyone enjoys a good story."³⁶

Similarly, she thought that a story or play should provide instruction through the action of the plot and not through the dialogue alone. She did not enjoy literature that was didactic and believed that an audience did not "want to be preached to."³⁷ She insisted that good authors revealed their messages or lessons through their art. It was, in her opinion the most effective form of instruction.

On the Performer

Moorehead employed many metaphors to describe performers. She spoke of them as "great evangelists." As such, the performer has a duty to provide the audience with moral values as well as a "responsibility to give meaning, and food for thought, and peace of mind and joy in a world

that is troubled. . . ."39 Moorehead declared that she had never met a great artist who did not have a spiritual nature.⁴⁰ This nature expressed itself as love and Moorehead maintained that when a performer felt love for the audience, "the terms in which [the performer] put this [is] 'How can I comfort you?'"⁴¹

Moorehead also described the performer as a salesman who, moving from town to town, offers a "fantasy" for sale.⁴² For her this fantasy was a world of make-believe that presented the audience with an experience that was both instructive and entertaining. She cautioned performers to remember that this "world of make-believe becomes [the audience's] world for awhile, and it should be generous with them for they will go to any length to get into it."⁴³

The performer creates this make-believe world through talent. Moorehead maintained that talent is God-given and should not be analyzed, since it is a "mysterious physic chemistry, half conscious and yet three quarters hidden, that [performers] may only define as 'instinct' or 'hunch'--that enables them to develop their vision and their art."⁴⁴ Talent distinguishes performers from non-performers, Moorehead believed, and makes performers "glamorous" in the public's mind. Moorehead advised performers to remain aloof and not to reveal themselves totally to the public for this reason.⁴⁵ It was her theory that aloofness heightened the sense of glamour that surrounds the performer, and glamour in

turn helped to create an appetite in the audience for make-believe.⁴⁶

With another metaphor, Moorehead likened the performer to a translator.⁴⁷ The performer translates the written word into sound and movement, making the author's vision manifest and giving the characters intellect and emotions. Moorehead compared the written word to a corpse into which the performer "breathes life and intellect." Furthermore, written words "are just words on paper, but he [the performer] had the talent and the talent is a magic . . . and abstraction . . . and he makes the character come alive."⁴⁸

To succeed in the role of translator, the performer, Moorehead believed, must lose his or her own ego during performance. Then the performer can portray any person in any period of history. For Moorehead, "once the curtain is raised, the [performer] ceases to be himself--he belongs to his character, to the author, and to the audience."⁴⁹

Moorehead did not discourage anyone from becoming a performer.⁵⁰ However, she contended that good performers are distinguished from bad performers not only by talent but by discipline as well. For Moorehead, discipline meant work and "constant schooling." Moorehead believed that without this discipline the performer's talent would wither.⁵¹ Moorehead maintained that the serious performer "is always studying to expand his talent."⁵²

The forms of study Moorehead required of the performer

varied. First, she urged every performer to get as much formal education as possible. By doing so, he or she has a wide, general knowledge of many fields of learning. Moreover, even when the performer has completed his education, his study must never stop. Moorehead encouraged every young performer to continue to read outside his chosen profession because "having a thorough understanding of literature, the arts, history . . . helps the artist interpret."⁵³

Second, Moorehead insisted that no performer can achieve success without a thorough knowledge of technique. Technique improves the talent of each performer, since it provides him with the requirements essential to a good presentation. Without a grounding in technique the performer is an incompetent, Moorehead believed.⁵⁴ On the other hand, she cautioned that dependence on technique alone is simply dexterity without talent and as such makes a performance "insincere."⁵⁵

Within the broad concept of technique, Moorehead stressed the study of physical movement. She advocated the study of dance, especially ballet, because it gives "an end result of smoothness and poise."⁵⁶ Dance also enhances the artist's ability to depict body movements of particular character types from different periods of history.

Moorehead also demanded that the serious young performer study speech.⁵⁷ It too helps to develop poise as well as clear diction and vocal variety.

Third, Moorehead suggested that performers observe and study people in daily life. Observation allows the performer to know how people express their emotions and desires. This knowledge can then be used by the performer in performance and gives credence and authenticity to his portrayals.

Finally, Moorehead believed that study was part of the act of performance and therefore the performer should take every opportunity to perform. Each performance helps the performer to expand himself as an artist. Moorehead believed that performing is "exhilarating, inspiring and never-tiring" and furthermore that performers "are happiest when they are working hardest."⁵⁸

Moorehead insisted that presentation and experience combined to make a person a better performer.⁵⁹ She stated that "It takes a great scope--putting the human quality on the stage," and therefore, the older performer is generally a better performer because he has more experience from which to draw both from life and from performing.⁶⁰

This opinion did not mean that Moorehead had less respect for the young performers. She thought the younger performer might be more spontaneous and creative because of his lack of pre-conceived notions about the requirements of a script or character. The older or more experienced performer may often fall into a trap of judging himself during a performance and destroy his characterizations.⁶¹

Moorehead cautioned both the younger and the older performer that "Building a career and artistic developments

do not necessarily go hand in hand; often the actor, as his career grows, begins to turn in work that gets more and more similar."⁶² For example, the actor who plays a role on a television series may be unable or unwilling after a few years to portray other characterizations that are distinct from his television role. Moorehead urged all performers to accept challenges and to take risks that would expand their creativity: "A variety of roles is necessary to the performer who is primarily concerned with becoming an all around portrayer of people from every walk of life."⁶³

A Theory of Performance

Moorehead advocated a theory, or system, or performance that incorporated three processes: repetition, representation and assistance.⁶⁴ The first process, repetition, is limited primarily to the rehearsal period, though the knowledge gained during this period is constantly used in performances. Performance is the logical extension of the rehearsal process, and repetition plays a part in a performance, since it is no more than a rehearsal for the next performance. Even during the final performance the performer should approach the event as an opportunity to learn and to discover more about the script and the character, Moorehead reasoned.

During the repetition process the performer is committed to study and to learning. The performer is committed to

studying the script for its meaning and its values so that the characterization is true to the world created by the text. Moorehead was aware that some scripts are easier to perform because "they're written well; you're more capable of milking them dry of meaning. They also give you a chance to add motivation, meaning, anything which makes your performance more interesting to the audience."⁶⁵ Conversely, she claimed that "If a part is bad, even more of a challenge to try to make something of it. . . ."⁶⁶

It is during the rehearsal period that the performer leaves the limitations presented by the text. Moorehead believed that whether a text be good or bad the performer must create a characterization that accurately reflects human behavior. This reflected human behavior must be accurate in both physical and emotional responses.⁶⁷

It is also during the repetition process that the performer learns the "business" required of a part, that is, entrances and exits as well as stage positions and gestures. To do this, Moorehead stressed that scripts must be memorized. This is the standard practice for dramatic productions, but Moorehead believed it was especially true for readings because "when you are free of the script, you can make [a reading] more interesting visually by moving around the stage."⁶⁸ The reader who is confined to the script is trapped into position and limited in physical expression.

Moorehead believed that a script provided the performer

with "bones" of a characterization, but the performer must make the role tangible by adding the "skin."⁶⁹ This fleshing out of a role begins with the repetition process. For Moorehead, a performer's role is a "tool"⁷⁰ and through repetition a performer learns its "mechanics."⁷¹ The repetition process affords the performer the opportunity to compose his or her thoughts. Subsequently, the performer is not hampered by thoughts of mechanics (i.e.: stage movements and business) in performance. The performer is free to concentrate upon the emotional and intellectual states of the character portrayed.

Representation is the second process in Moorehead's system. By representation she meant that "something of the past is shown again. It takes yesterday's action and makes it live again."⁷² By action, she meant emotional states as well as physical movements.

For Moorehead, representation was the act of performance. She insisted that performers not become their characters but only represent or indicate their characters. She understood that a performer could not actually become a character but also knew that many performers believed in this possibility. The attempt was self-defeating, Moorehead thought, because performers sacrificed control. Moorehead insisted that loss of control would destroy the character. She maintained that performers should "always be aware of everything that is going on on the stage . . . and the emotionally involved performer cannot do this."⁷³

The performer who loses control, Moorehead reasoned, loses creativity. She stated that "the hardest task of all for an actor is to be sincere yet detached--it is sometimes drummed into an actor that all he needs is sincerity--it is only through detachment that an actor sees his own cliches." In her words:

You're two people on the stage, in any event--you're the instrument and the player. The instrument takes charge of the player keeps the reins on him [sic], and the player's the one that goes. But he can't be allowed to get out of hand, and that's where technique comes in, and discipline, and work, and knowledge, and experience. Playing a part is having a detached detachment.⁷⁵

Moorehead thought that without a sense of perspective provided through emotional detachment the performer ran the risk of stereotyping or reproducing mechanically and consequently destroying his creativity in performance.⁷⁶ When the performer destroyed his creativity, he limited his imagination and "Imagination should never be limited. It should be free and open so it can soar. It might not be right, but at least it is unlimited."⁷⁷

Moorehead's insistence upon the performer's detachment from his characterization informed her practice. She believed that a performance is an "effect;"⁷⁸ it is not real life. The creation of a characterization, Moorehead maintained, is a process of selection and arrangement of emotional states and physical actions. The performer heightens the salient attributes and emotions of a character and discards all details which distract or confuse the

audience. In the reading of a particular character such as a postman, the performer needs only to represent the essential quality of the character and allow the audience to fill in whatever details they need to make the postman exist for them.⁷⁹ For example, if the performer chooses to characterize the postman as tired, he must use his voice and body to do so. The audience member is asked to imagine through his knowledge of a postman's job how the state of tiredness was achieved.

Representation operates in conjunction with assistance, the third element in Moorehead's system. Whether acting or reading, a performance is completed through the mutual assistance of the performer and the audience. Because he is in control of his emotions and physical mechanics, the good performer can sense the audience's moods, needs and expectations and can adjust to create the best response. The performer's ability to sense the reactions of the audience is true not only of particular readings but of the arrangement of the selections. Selections, Moorehead reasoned, can be re-arranged during performance to achieve the greatest response and success.⁸⁰

The performer represents emotions and gestures to the needed degree but allows the audience members to complete the actions in their minds. The completion of the performer's actions by the audience can "result in the merging of representation by the (spectator's) eyes, focus, desires, and enjoyment and concentration."⁸¹ Moorehead most often

illustrated this process in stating that it was her job to start the tears but that it was the audience's job to do the crying.⁸² She believed that the process of assistance provided audience involvement while simultaneously allowing the performer to retain his control.

Moorehead rebuked those performers who thought the audience was beneath them and could not add to the performance process. She viewed the act of performance as a communal event. "It's the circle the public wants to see, the great circle, as an idea extends from actor to actor to audience to actor to actor to audience ad infinitum. It's a tremendous circle of thought, of communication."⁸³ For her, the audience was more than a sounding board for the performer's talent; it was a partner in creativity. She admonished her fellow performers to remember that they "may be ill, tired, vexed, distracted, but bored you may not and must not be, disdainful of your audience you must not be."⁸⁴

Contemporary Theories of Oral Performance Found in College Textbooks of the 1950's and 1960's

In 1968, Mary Margaret Robb published a revised edition of her book Oral Interpretation of Literature in American Colleges and Universities. In it she includes an examination of oral interpretation textbooks written or revised during the preceding fifteen years. Robb's examination provides an "overview of the work done in the classroom and a glimpse of

the different approaches used by the teachers."⁸⁵ Citing Paul Albert Marcoux,⁸⁶ Robb states that interpretation theories had become standardized, but that teachers chose a variety of approaches to accomplish their goals. "The agreement lay in the general purpose defined as illuminating literature for the reader and for the listener. The differences were found in the manner of preparation to accomplish this objective."⁸⁷ Consequently, teachers selected classroom textbooks based upon the approach taken by the author or authors.

Robb divides oral interpretation textbooks into three distinct categories based upon the theoretical approach of authors. The categories are traditional, communicative and literary. Robb argues that the "distinctions were similar to those made between the natural and mechanical schools in that, again, the purpose was the same but the methods were different."⁸⁸ Furthermore, Robb maintains that none of the textbooks examined mirror strictly pure approaches within each text.

Robb labels the first approach traditional, since its practitioners are primarily concerned with developing the student's delivery. The traditional approach emphasizes the student's need to become an effective performer. The effective performer is aware of body and vocal skills and "the stimulation of the imagination through sensory imagery. . . ."⁸⁹

The student's study of effects, the practitioners of

this approach argue, should stimulate his imagination during the rehearsal process, thereby providing a key to the emotional meaning of a work of literature. In performance, the student uses the effects he believes to be most suitable to the realization of the author's work in the listener's imagination. The student is encouraged to learn good vocal management through the study of pitch, rhythm, quality and stress among other effects. The student is also encouraged to develop freedom of movement of both facial expressions and bodily actions.

The traditional approach to the study of oral interpretation through effective delivery is found in the textbooks of such authors as Lionel Crocker and Louis M. Eich's Oral Reading, Sara Lowrey and Gertrude E. Johnson's Interpretative Reading; and Otis J. Aggertt and Elbert R. Bowen's Communicative Reading. Lowrey and Johnson held the belief that training students to become effective readers influenced their abilities as effective communicators in all of the subdisciplines within the speech field. They write, "The reading of literature expressive of various moods is the method used to cultivate flexibility of voice and the alert discriminating mind essential for all expression."⁹⁰ It is a belief shared by the majority of traditional practitioners.

On the other hand, practitioners of the traditional approach were aware also that students must learn to analyze works of literature to obtain the full meanings within them. Crocker and Eich advise students to remember that "oral

reading involves the technique of impression (analysis) and the technique of expression (projection)."⁹¹ Traditionalists encourage students to analyze works of literature to discover the meaning of words and the relationship of one word to another and the parts to the whole. Textual analysis is a prelude to effective delivery because it enhances the student's ability to make considered judgments upon the nature and quality of literary works.

Robb's second category, the communicative approach, demonstrates the influence of behavioral psychology upon the theory of oral interpretation. Behaviorists hold "that objectively observable organismic behavior constitutes the essential or exclusive scientific basis of psychological data and investigation" and "stress" the role of environment as a determinant of human and animal behavior."⁹² This statement means, in the simplest terms, that all humans react to the stimuli in their environment and that changes in stimuli or environments effect corresponding changes in human behavior. Behavior is defined as physical, mental or emotional behavior.

Practitioners of the communicative approach conceive of the author, reader and listener as links in a chain through which human experiences are transferred. The practitioners maintain that authors of literature create an experience, a stimulus, that can change the behavior of the reader. But the successful transfer of experience is accomplished only through a thorough analysis of the author's work, which

creates a realization or actualization of the experience in the reader's mind. The reader cannot realize for the listener an experience he does not understand and, therefore, cannot effect a change in his own behavior or that of the listener.

The practitioners of the communicative approach "subscribe . . . to the belief that all art is an organization of experience and that the reader's experience and that of his audience may be highly important as an educative and recreative process."⁹³ This approach is found in the textbooks of Wilma H. Grimes and Alethea S. Mattingly (Interpretation: Reader, Writer, Audience), Chloe Armstrong and Paul Brandes (Oral Interpretation of Literature) and Wallace Bacon and Robert Breen (Literature as Experience). These authors agree that the oral performance of literature is an admirable stimulus in the student reader's environment and extends his experience of the world. In the words of Armstrong and Brandes: "Actual participation in the oral performance results in a more active response on the part of the student. This process should broaden the scope of the student's awareness, deepen his appreciation, and consequently, add to the enrichment of his total life."⁹⁴

The literary approach, Robb's third category, is advocated in The Performing Voice in Literature by Robert Beloof, The Sound, Sense and Performance of Literature by Don Geiger, The Art of Interpretation by Wallace Bacon and, to a lesser degree, Charlotte Lee's Oral Interpretation. These

writers acknowledge the influence of the New Critics upon their thoughts about oral performance.

The New Critics viewed the author of a literary work "as a maker and consolidator of experience. Thus the art object is unique and self-contained, and, in order to be understood, its design must be observed in all its essential parts."⁹⁵ Literary practitioners agree with the New Critics that authors create experiences for the reader. The belief is held by the practitioners of the communicative approach as well, but unlike them, the literary practitioners are not concerned with the modification of human behavior through oral performance. This last group has, in fact, little concern for the communication of literature to an audience;⁹⁶ their goal is the analytical exploration of literature.

The literary approach is a conscious attempt to conform to the literary environment of the twentieth century. Earlier western literature reflects a communal awareness based upon an agreed moral order or upon a background of shared mythology and legend. For example, many of Shakespeare's plays as well as those of George Bernard Shaw reveal the influence of ancient Greek and Roman authors. In the twentieth century, especially since World War I, the modern author "often depends upon shifts in tone, upon irony and suggestion, upon symbol and indirection, rather than upon logical development and direct statement, he often presents the reader with a kind of puzzle."⁹⁷

The literary practitioners believe it necessary for students to develop techniques which unlock the author's puzzle, since many modern works "rely upon the sensitivity of the author himself."⁹⁸ But not the New Critics!

The dramatic, or dramatistic, analysis is the most common technique advocated by these practitioners. The analytical technique employed by this category of textbook authors is, in fact, a form of literary analysis developed by the aesthetician Kenneth Burke, who had been influenced by the New Critics. In this form of analysis, non-dramatic works are given the same form of analysis as dramatic literature. Analytical emphasis is placed upon the identification and explication of the speaking voice or voices heard in the work. The answers to the questions Who is speaking? When? Where? To Whom? and Why? offer the best evidence for solving the author's puzzle. Geiger and Beloof caution students of the danger of becoming "symbol hunters" and of reading into works meanings that are not there.

Moorehead's Theory and Textbook Approaches Compared

The theories and approaches employed by textbook authors are found in Moorehead's personal theory of performance. The extent of Moorehead's personal study of the theory of oral performance can only be surmised. However, the fact that she taught courses in oral interpretation both in the university environment and in her own school and the fact that she

performed and lectured on many college campuses where she spoke with many teachers and students of oral interpretation must have provided sufficient contact to keep Moorehead abreast of current theory.

Moorehead was an eclectic thinker, and aspects of each of the three approaches appear in her personal theory in the same manner that aspects of each approach overlap into the other two. Like the practitioners of the traditional approach, Moorehead, in her interviews and lectures, advised young performers to study vocal management and physical movement. She was aware that without textual study the reader could not begin to understand the author's work, and in this, Moorehead was in agreement with the practitioners of all three approaches, that exploration and explication of the text was mandatory for the successful reading. Finally, Moorehead's theory concurred with the tenet of the communicative approach that oral performance was a means of educating and changing the behavior of the listener.

Moorehead received a sound education in vocal production as well as physical movement while attending the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. This knowledge remained with her throughout her life, and though she was a superb mimic, Moorehead knew that successful effects could be achieved through technical excellence. She stressed proper speech (diction and grammar), good vocal skills and voice production as the foremost requirement of the performer in her own

school of performance. The study of technique was for Moorehead the groundwork of performance.

Moorehead maintained that every work of literature was a unique experience for the reader. She agreed with the practitioners of the literary approach that every work must be submitted to an intensive comprehensive study to determine the author's meaning. She believed that "the fragments of language--every tone of speech, every rhyme pattern is a fragment of language and corresponds to a different experience. They are as distinctive as thumb-prints."⁹⁹

For Moorehead, every literary work was a separate experience that presented a new set of ideas and emotions. A performer who failed to study the work before performance did not have the resources to succeed. Furthermore, the performer who relied solely upon delivery sacrificed substance for style, since "all the mechanism [technique] in the world will accomplish nothing. Comprehensive study must precede performance."¹⁰⁰

Moorehead's theory and approach to performance was most similar to the communicative approach described by Robb. Moorehead, like the practitioners of the communicative approach, viewed performance as an educative and re-creative process. Moorehead contended that if a performance "doesn't teach or inform, or if it doesn't entertain and relax it is not worthwhile."¹⁰¹ A performance which did both simultaneously was superior, she maintained.

Moorehead believed that the performance of literature afforded the listener the opportunity to experience vicariously environments and human behavior that might be otherwise unknown in everyday life. She understood that the reader's performance could become a catalyst for changing the listener's behavior through the presentation of an author's work. For Moorehead, performance was "a great educational medium, teaching an audience many things that would ultimately be lost to them, widening their sympathies and broadening their intellects and sweetening their hearts."¹⁰²

In her lecture, Moorehead spoke of the quest of each generation to answer the same, unchanging questions of the universe. She said:

I find the best answers in books. The profound thoughts and loftiest achievements, I find in these written records. Books have influenced a great many people about important things over a number of years. Through them the wisdom of the centuries becomes the common property of the people.¹⁰³

The reader can help the listener answer moral, ethical, philosophical and social questions through performance, Moorehead contended.

Finally, for Moorehead, the reader was like a transmitter through whom passed the words of the author out to the listener. The reader, skilled in the art of delivery and enlightened with the knowledge acquired from textual study, stimulated the listener's imagination. It was assistance, the stimulated imagination of the listener, that Moorehead sought to achieve from her performance. She

believed that a performance took place in the listener's mind and was a merging of the author's words, the reader's skills and the enlivened imagination of the listener.

Endnotes

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Chapter V

Summary and Conclusions

This study addressed the career of Agnes Moorehead as a professional performer of literature. It was designed specifically to trace the origin, development and history of Moorehead's solo performance career. Furthermore, it offers a hypothesis of Moorehead's personal theory of performance based upon her practice, lectures and writings.

Moorehead's public reading career was largely influenced by the personal theories and practices of Charles Laughton and Paul Gregory. Both of these men taught Moorehead much about the nature of oral performance, its purpose and its requirements. Their influence, especially the influence of Laughton, was reflected in Moorehead's programming as well as her performance style.

However, Moorehead was a strong-willed, highly-motivated professional artist who assumed complete responsibility for her artistic endeavors. Her achievements were based ultimately upon three pillars of faith: 1) Faith in her personal religious convictions, 2) Faith in her innate artistic sensibilities and performance skills, and 3) Faith in her knowledge of the theatre-going public during the

period in which she achieved her greatest success as an oral performer.

Moorehead was unarguably a success as an oral performer of literature. The longevity of Moorehead's career supports this conclusion. Moorehead toured her solo program for nearly twenty years. Had it not been successful, the project would have folded after the end of the first tour, if not before. The critical acclaim bestowed upon Moorehead by unbiased reviewers further supports this conclusion.

Moorehead's success as an oral performer of literature rested upon her created performance persona. However, her programming and her skill in performing literature also contributed to her success. Moorehead's program was a rhetorical device; she and Laughton selected and arranged her materials to achieve desired effects, that is, emotional and/or intellectual responses, from her audiences. It is fortunate that Moorehead preserved the script of her solo program, and that it is available for study to determine its effective principles.

Many of the programming techniques taught in university courses in the 1950's and 1960's are found in Moorehead's programming. The techniques advocated by Alethea Smith Mattingly and Wilma H. Grimes in their college textbook¹ are the same as those Moorehead employed. For example, Mattingly and Grimes suggest that short, light selections should be performed first and in a group so that the audience can be "polarized" to the conventions of interpretative reading.

Furthermore, the heaviest, most dramatic selection should be placed near the end of the program but not as the last selection. This is the procedure Moorehead followed in arranging her climactic selection, Sorry, Wrong Number, within her program. Mattingly and Grimes argue that all of the selections in a reading program should display "variety and contrast, progression and climax, and unity." Moorehead's programming illustrated all of the authors' principles with the exception of unity. It is important to note that Mattingly and Grimes wrote in the years following Laughton's success as an oral reader and it is possible that their principles reflect the techniques that Laughton made popular with his programming.

Moorehead's performance skill was an intangible property that passed out of existence with her death. It is unfortunate that a complete performance of Moorehead's solo program was not preserved on film. A filmed version would best illustrate her skill in selecting and arranging performance devices to achieve effective responses. There do exist a few selections from her program--most notably Sorry, Wrong Number--on phono discs, and though they offer some idea of her performance skill, the lack of visual stimuli offers later audiences only limited knowledge of the effectiveness of her skill in performance.

Moorehead's solo program illustrates many of the programming practices and performance techniques found in the solo programs of other performers during the middle twentieth

century. On the other hand, much of her program was considerably different in concept from the programs of other performers.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the period in which Moorehead performed her solo program, a discussion that emphasizes the intellectual environment of the period and the place of oral performance of literature within this environment. There follows an overview of the careers of other solo performers of literature with an examination of their programming and performance techniques. Such an overview offers an opportunity to compare and contrast Moorehead's programming and performance techniques to those found in the work of other distinguished solo performers. The second half of this chapter examines Moorehead's theory of performance in relationship to her practice.

Cultural Renaissance in the United States In the Second Half of the Twentieth Century

A cultural renaissance flourished in the United States during the second half of the twentieth century. The cultural historian Alvin Toffler was awe-struck by the amount of activity he discovered in the various artistic disciplines, an activity maintained by professional artists, and more importantly, by amateur artists in the cities and small towns throughout the country. Toffler, writing as late as 1961, reported that:

a generation ago H.L. Mencken could characterize vast stretches of the United States as a 'Sahara of the Bozarts'. . . . Now the United States is experiencing a cultural surge of truly unprecedented proportions, which began shortly after World War II, gathered momentum during the early 1950's, and, in the last few years, has washed into the least likely corners of the land.²

These activities included the forming of arts councils and artists' guilds as well as the founding of symphonies, operas, little theatres and dance troupes.

This cultural explosion greatly affected the theatre of the 1950's. For example, the professional New York theatres experienced a remarkable business during the decade, especially the American musical theatre. The off-Broadway movement began in the early 1950's with Jose Quintero's production of Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams. Off-Broadway became a haven for classical and experimental drama that had a limited appeal for Broadway audiences. This movement rapidly accelerated throughout the decade because of lower production costs than those required to produce a play on Broadway. Lower production costs helped to keep box office ticket prices down and thereby increased sales.

The little theatre movement also experienced a renaissance during the 1950's, especially in the cities outside of New York City. Many community theatres later became professional nonprofit theatres supported by a financial base of season subscribers. The Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis

and the Alley Theatre in Houston are three examples of this phenomenon.

The economic stability of the United States with its booming post-war economy was the impetus behind the cultural renaissance of the 1950's. With the peace that followed the war, American industry turned to the task of producing the goods demanded by the populace that had for many years survived on basic essentials and now desired the labor-saving devices and luxuries made available through advanced technology.

American industry enjoyed prosperity, and management was inclined to share this prosperity with labor. The 1950's were golden years for the American working-class. Throughout the period salaries rose and working hours decreased. Millions of working class Americans had the time and the money to pursue cultural activities that had been previously unavailable to them.

Education was another contributing cause for the cultural explosion of the 1950's. Millions of demobilized military personnel took advantage of the educational allotments provided by the G. I. Bill and returned to school to obtain a better or higher education.

Admittedly, the numbers of students enrolled in arts curricula were few; however, the liberal arts courses taken by students not enrolled in arts curricula in conjunction with the general intellectual environment maintained on college campuses exposed these new students to the cultural

movements of the past and also of contemporary society. Extra-curricular activities, such as theatre, music and dance, available to the entire student body, helped to extend this exposure. The result was a generation of educated men and women better able to appreciate and with more appetite for the arts.

The expansion of mass communication media also supported the cultural explosion of the 1950's. The once experimental medium of television was perfected to the point that television sets became affordable, and local television stations proliferated throughout the country. On the one hand, critics of television argued that television appealed to lowbrow tastes as millions of Americans forsook other cultural activities to remain at home watching a glowing blue screen filled with mediocre programming.³ On the other hand, the 1950's have been described as "the golden age of television" primarily because of many live television dramas by young authors such as Paddy Chaiyefsky and William Gibson. Programs produced by the Hallmark Hall of Fame, The Armstrong Hour, The Philco Playhouse, and Playhouse 90 enjoyed a wide appeal.

Television's popularity had a disastrous effect upon the radio and motion picture industry. Radio dramas became the thing of the past as more and more radio programming was limited to popular music. Ticket sales at movie theatres declined. Motion picture executives heavily relied upon big budget spectacles to promote ticket sales in the 1950's.

These spectaculars appealed to the public because they offered such effects as, in the lyrics of Cole Porter, "breath-taking technicolor and wide-screen cinemascope and stereophonic sound."

One cultural activity that television did not adversely affect was reading. Book sales increased during the 1950's. This was due primarily to the appeal of paperback editions, though hardcover editions also sold well. Most paperback books were "how-to-books," but editions of classical and distinguished contemporary literature also had a wide market. Oscar Dystel, President of Bantam Books in the 1950's, gave television credit for increased book sales; he stated: "Believe it or not . . . I think television is behind the whole thing. It has broadened people's horizons."⁴

Oral Performance of Literature After World War II

The oral performance of literature experienced a renaissance in America during the years following World War II. This renewed interest in oral performance reflected the American population's conscious search for culture during this period. In many ways, this renaissance mirrored the development of the Chautauqua circuit of the late nineteenth century.

The Chautauqua circuit began with four Bible readings in Chautauqua, New York, 1874.⁵ It developed into an intellectual vaudeville, and by the 1880's, prominent readers

such as A.P. Burbank and Robert McLean Comstock traveled through rural America along an established circuit made up of town halls, schools and other public gathering places. The vaudeville circuit was formed to provide popular entertainment to less discriminating members of the population. The Chautauqua circuit, on the other hand, brought intellectually stimulating and morally uplifting readings from the Bible, Shakespeare, and works by prominent authors to "a culture-thirsty, and appreciative audience."⁶

The factors that caused the Chautauqua to develop in the nineteenth century were the same factors at work in the renaissance of oral performance less than a hundred years later. During both periods, the nation was at peace. Peace brought economic growth and prosperity, with increased leisure time available to a widening middle class. Improved systems of communication made news and information about the cultural activities in large, urban centers accessible to America's remote, rural areas.

The demand for educational advancement rose during both periods. Reading for knowledge as well as reading for entertainment increased in the 1950's as it had during the 1880's because of this demand. Consequently, it was a small step from private silent reading to public oral reading. This realization became evident to Charles Laughton during the Second World War. It was a realization that was to make

Laughton an influential leader of what can be labeled the New Chautauqua of the 1950's.

Prominent Oral Performers

In the Years Following World War II

The Chautauqua circuit's popularity declined during the first decades of the twentieth century. One major reason for this decline was the influx of ill-trained performers who relied upon standardized, or bastardized, systems of delivery that placed emphasis upon the performer's movements and gestures with little or no concern for the intellectual and emotional content of the materials performed. Focus upon the performer was primary and focus on the material was secondary. The result was the presentation of works of literature of not the best quality.

As the popularity of oral reading declined as a public art form, it became an accepted discipline of study within the academic community. Such distinguished speech educators as S. H. Clark and Maud May Babcock decried the excesses of the "elocutionists" of the Chautauqua. They insisted upon a more scientific approach to the oral study of literature and of delivery. Emphasis was placed upon the student's acquired understanding of an author's work through oral performance.

Charles Laughton agreed with speech educators that textual study through performance increased a performer's understanding of a work of literature.⁷ He also believed

that literature in performance was a shared experience among author, reader and listener. He taught this belief to his students in his own private classes. Literature as a shared experience was a tenet of Moorehead's personal theory of performance and, though she may not have acquired this belief directly from Laughton, it is reasonable to assume that it was a belief they jointly held during their long association.

Laughton's years of study and practice made him preeminent as a leader of the renaissance of oral performance of literature. With his solo program An Armful of Books he almost singlehandedly revitalized the public's interest in oral reading as an art form. However, there were oral performers who had successful careers in the years between the two World Wars. Their names were Ruth Draper and Cornelia Otis Skinner.

Draper and Skinner used a similar performance style that differed from Laughton's style. Laughton was a platform reader, that is, a reader who stood before an audience as himself and offered selections from the works of various authors. This distinction does not mean that Laughton did not at times take on the vocal and physical characteristics of the characters in the pieces he performed, but it does mean that during transitional passages he remained himself. This performance style is sometimes labeled "low definition" because the characters performed are not specifically defined through the use of costumes and properties.

Draper and Skinner were monologuists. Their monologues

were soliloquies during which the artists assumed the vocal and physical characteristics of their selections' speakers. Each of them used a variety of costume accessories such as hats, shawls, pocketbooks and the like to further dramatize for their audiences the characters portrayed. This technique is known as "high definition." Furthermore, both Draper and Skinner wrote their own performance materials, and neither used transitions between selections. Their programs were memorized, and they used no books as props in the manner of Laughton.

Draper and Skinner shared many performance techniques, but differed in their approach to programming. Each of Draper's selections was an individual unit with a beginning, middle and end. After the conclusion of one selection, Draper paused, changed accessories, and began a new selection that featured a new speaker, or speakers, in a new situation. Each selection was a concentrated or miniature drama.⁸

Skinner used the same method of programming in her earliest shows. The Wives of Henry the Eighth, for example, consisted of six monologues, one by each of Henry's wives. In later years Skinner became dissatisfied with this method. She wrote full length plays with inciting incident, rising action, climax and denouement that featured a series of monologues by different speakers. Skinner called her plays monologue-dramas.⁹ The three act monologue-drama Paris 90 was her most successful production, and she began her tour of

this production in 1952, two years before Moorehead began her solo reading career.

Draper began her professional career shortly after the end of the First World War. Skinner began her solo performance career in the late 1930's and the careers of both women overlapped the solo career of Agnes Moorehead. Another solo performer whose solo career began the years following World War II was Emlyn Williams.

Williams, a Welshman, was a successful playwright (The Corn is Green and Night Must Fall) and actor before he became a solo performer of literature. His first solo program was entitled Emlyn Williams as Charles Dickens. After a successful London engagement, Williams brought his show to the United States in 1952. In 1957, Williams' second solo program, Dylan Thomas Growing Up, was presented in New York.

In Emlyn Williams as Charles Dickens, Williams presented a two hour program of readings from the works of Dickens. Each selection was approximately ten minutes in length. Wearing a Victorian costume and a beard, and using a replica of the reading stand Dickens used during his American reading tour of the 1860's, Williams won acclaim from the critics and the public.

Williams' performance style was a combination of platform reading and acting. His critics labeled Williams' performance an impersonation, but Williams' insisted that he only "pretended" to be Dickens. John S. Gentile writes that:

In preparing his solo performance, Williams' energy was directed toward polishing his own personal interpretation of Dickens' prose, after which he simply added costume and beard. Williams did not, despite similarities in performance styles, attempt to imitate either Dickens as a performer or Dickens as a man.¹⁰

Williams assumed the role of Dickens in the same manner an actor in a play assumes a role, providing an individual interpretation of what the actor conceives the character to be.

In Emlyn Williams as Charles Dickens, the similarities in Williams' performance style with the styles of Draper, Skinner and Laughton are obvious. However, there were apparent dissimilarities among the performer's styles as well. Williams, as Dickens, was a platform reader who presumably read to his audience, in the same manner as Laughton though, in fact, his selections were memorized. Laughton always presented himself as himself to his audiences during transitions; Williams remained in the character of Dickens throughout the performance.

Draper, Skinner and Williams chose to hide behind the mask of a character. However, Draper and Skinner presented a variety of characters before their audiences, a new character for each monologue. Williams' style was more complex. He was a performer acting the part of Dickens who in turn represented through vocal and physical techniques the characters discovered in the selections. The three

performers' talents notwithstanding, Williams' layering of illusion upon illusion gave his style a greater density than those of either Draper or Skinner.

Williams built his Dylan Thomas Growing Up upon the theme of maturation. Using selections from Thomas' writings, Williams illustrated the passage from childhood to early adolescence. Williams' intent was to present his interpretation of Thomas' works.

Williams conceived a performance style for Dylan Thomas Growing Up that was different from the style he had used in his Dickens program. Again, Williams presented himself as Thomas, speaking directly to his audience as if he were Thomas during the transitional passages. However, Williams made no attempt to look like Thomas physically either through the use of make-up or costume.¹¹

The American actor Hal Holbrook was another major solo performer during the 1950's. His program entitled Mark Twain Tonight! offered selections from the works of the American humorist with transitional passages constructed by Holbrook. Holbrook performed his program with some regularity throughout the 1950's and 1960's and indeed, he has performed it as recently as 1986, in India.

Holbrook's performance style is similar to that used by Williams in his Dickens program. However, Williams' portrayal of Dickens was secondary to the interpretation of the material performed; "Holbrook, on the other hand, was interested in bringing Twain the man to the stage and simply

used readings from the author's works as a part of his recreation."¹²

Holbrook spent many years in researching Twain's life. He was more fortunate than Williams in that Twain's voice was recorded and his gestures and physical movements filmed. Using a wig, mustache, elaborate make-up and costume, Holbrook presented his "three-act play." The set for the original Broadway production contained "a tasteless reading stand, a table and chair that are equally morose; the reading stand contain[ed] a shuffle of papers; the table, a clutter of books, a water pitcher, glass and ash tray."¹³ He, at times, spoke directly to his audience, but like Williams, Holbrook mastered the double illusion of actor portraying author portraying characters in the selections.

An Analysis of Moorehead's Programming and Performance Style

Moorehead's programming was most similar to Laughton's programming, a fact that is unstartling, since Laughton not only directed Moorehead's solo program but also helped to compile the script. Unlike Draper, Skinner, Williams, and Holbrook, Laughton and Moorehead practiced eclecticism in their programming of selections. Each performed works by a variety of authors.

The reasons behind Moorehead's preference for variety in selections is a subject for speculation. However, three

substantial reasons cannot be overlooked. First, the original concept for Moorehead's program was to provide selections that illustrated the theme "different kinds of women through the ages." Moorehead and Laughton must have decided that selections by a variety of authors was the best means to achieve this end.

The remaining two reasons have less to do with Moorehead's program than with her "teacher-student" relationship to Laughton. Laughton as well as Moorehead had been an avid reader of literature since early childhood. The act of sharing with others literary selections the reader enjoyed was a major tenet of Laughton's performance theory. It was a tenet that Moorehead also held. Finally, Laughton believed that each selection must have variety to help maintain the audience's interest, especially, a large audience "where individuals melt into the composite. . . ."14 It is reasonable to argue that he applied this principle to his programming and to Moorehead's as well.

The programming of selections as well as the encore material for Moorehead's original tour in 1954 contained seven nonfictional works, two poems, two selections from works of drama, and five pieces of literary fiction. The story of Noah and the Ark and Thurber's "Lavender with a Difference" are included in the above list as fictional works because they tell a story and are not limited to a strict re-telling of historical incidents. Sorry, Wrong Number is listed as a drama.

Prose selections dominated the program. Furthermore, with the exceptions of the nonfictional selections and the cutting from "The Great Lover," each selection contained a strongly developed narrative with sharply etched, vivid characterizations.

Moorehead's programming was a blend of light, humorous pieces and somber, more serious selections. She performed the humorous pieces first and reserved the serious selections for the latter moments of each act. This method of programming is advocated by most authors of interpretation textbooks.¹⁵ It is a technique that allows the reader to "warmup" the audience, gain their attention, and acclimate their thinking to the conventions of oral reading before proceeding to material that requires greater attention and thought. Whether Moorehead learned this technique in her interpretation course or through her association with Laughton is a problem for conjecture.

The eclecticism that permeated Moorehead's programming was also apparent in her performance style. Unlike Draper, Skinner, Laughton, Williams or Holbrook, Moorehead was neither a monologist, a platform reader, or an impersonator. However, she displayed elements of these various styles within her performances.

Moorehead never used a reading stand during her program, but she did at times stand with a book in hand and pretend to read a memorized selection to the audience. The use of platform reading techniques was limited to a few of

Moorehead's selections.¹⁶ Most of her selections were to a greater or lesser extent fully blocked, that is, the vocal delivery was accompanied with physical movements about the stage.

Moorehead also used the techniques of a monologist. A dramatic monologue is a self-contained little drama. The scene, or place of action, is concrete. Though in performance the scene may be represented fully, as in Skinner's Paris 90, or suggested through verbal description and/or physical movement, as in Draper's "The Italian Lesson," the speaker is always inside the scene.

Sorry, Wrong Number is essentially a dramatic monologue. Moorehead's performance style for this selection closely resembled Draper's style. There are no filmed versions of either performance; however, the recorded version displayed a similarity in style. In the selections, the scenes are specific locations. Throughout the performances, Draper and Moorehead remain in character and within the confines of the scenes. Neither performer ever addresses their audience directly.

The techniques of impersonation also appeared in Moorehead's performance style to a limited degree. Her performance of Elizabeth I in the "Letter to the Bishop of Ely" was a good example of Moorehead's use of these techniques. Moorehead's "full characterization" of Elizabeth "revealed the strength and power of the Queen in a few well chosen words."¹⁷

Moorehead's "full characterization" of Elizabeth was brief in comparison to the extended impersonations of Dickens and Twain by Williams and Holbrook. Furthermore, Moorehead did not employ the elaborate make-up and costuming that the men used in their programs. She wore the same gown throughout her program.

Moorehead used an accent in conjunction with bodily carriage and demeanor to create her impersonation of Elizabeth I. Indeed, her impersonation was more acting than anything else. In this, she seemed to follow the same line of reasoning as Emlyn Williams: that it is necessary to base a performance upon a conception of a historical person, not upon an accurate, detailed impersonation.

In her performance of "Lavender with a Difference" and "Moses and the Bullrush," Moorehead employed a technique that combined the techniques of a platform reader and a dramatic monologist. For example, in "Lavender with a Difference" Moorehead assumed the character of the narrator and spoke directly to her audience. As the narrator, Moorehead provided the audience with narration, description and commentary. She also portrayed the other characters in the story and during the various scenes became the mother, the aunt, the brother and so on. Moorehead performed the actions ascribed to each character.

Moorehead performed "Moses and the Bullrush" in the same manner. She was the Negro narrator as well as the Pharoah and his daughter. Moorehead was not a quick change artist,

and she used low definition to create character without aid of costumes, make-up and properties. She represented, or indicated, her characters through the use of voice and physical movement and gestures.

One reviewer described the performance of Thurber's story as "a fully acted out reading."¹⁸ "Moses and the Bullrush" was described by another reviewer as "a highly animated sketch."¹⁹ The performance style was appropriate for each of these two selections. Both contained multiple scenes connected by narration. Moorehead's performance style allowed her to both show and tell such incidents as the aunt inundated by the pack of dogs in "Lavender with a Difference" and the incongruity of the Pharoah shooting craps in "Mose and the Bullrush." Both selections are farcical pieces and provided Moorehead many opportunities to display her vocal and physical abilities to demonstrate characterization. They also afforded her the opportunity to display her much praised comic timing.

Agnes Moorehead: Solo Performer of Literature

Moorehead believed that the selections presented to an audience should be entertaining, "morally uplifting," and instructive. She maintained that entertaining an audience was the most important of these three goals; a performer must help the audience to forget their everyday concerns for the duration of the performance. A performer should allow the

audience to enter a world of make-believe, a fantasy world full of enchantment and wonder.

Moorehead also maintained that realistic works that dealt with sordid, deplorable aspects of human nature had little entertainment value. She advocated the performance of plays, books and stories that elevated the minds of the audience. She was opposed to works that included coarse sexual alliance and a preoccupation with violence. She believed that the performer must help the audience to feel a sense of well-being about themselves and the world in which they lived. She wanted an audience to leave the performance with hope in their hearts, believing in the goodness of mankind.

Finally, Moorehead rejected a didactic theatre. She did not believe it was necessary for the performer to present selections with a "message" about a specific problem or political stance.

Moorehead believed that selections should tell good stories, that if a lesson were to be taught, it should be taught through the development and resolution of the story. Moorehead maintained that if the story were well constructed, the story's lesson would be apparent to the audience. No amount of editorializing by the author would make the audience enjoy a story that was not entertaining, Moorehead believed.

Moorehead's practice was congruent with her theory. She eschewed works she considered sordid and none of her

selections were unseemly in either language or action. The moral values inherent in the works she performed were similar to Moorehead's personal values.

The selections in Moorehead's program reflect three general themes. One, the world is a wonderful, joyous place filled with excitement and amusement even on the most mundane levels ("Lavender with a Difference," "Moses and the Bullrush"). Two, the human spirit is indomitable and can survive in adversity ("Some Like 'Em Cold," "Back to Methuselah"). Three, courageous action is an affirmation of faith in the future ("Noah and the Ark," "The Ballad of the Harp Weaver").

Some of these themes appear in more than two selections; some themes appear in none of the selections. The most glaring exception to the general thematic threads running through Moorehead's program is Sorry, Wrong Number. This story neither affirms a faith in the future or in mankind nor represents the world as a joyous place. However, Sorry, Wrong Number was Moorehead's signature sketch, a selection familiar to her audiences. Its deletion in the 1960's was more easily accomplished, since the popularity of radio drama had declined, but in the 1950's, Moorehead's reputation as an interpreter of this piece was a tremendous drawing card. Sorry, Wrong Number is a modern suspense story, and though it contains a murder, this dramatic possibility is outweighed by the improbabilities of a solitary, confined invalid accidentally overhearing on the telephone a plot to murder

her. In other words, audiences accept it more as a performance than as a potential reality.

Moorehead's program contained a balance of comic and serious selections. Nonetheless, much of her material was sentimental,²⁰ that is, the selections appealed primarily to the listener's emotions. This was especially true of her serious pieces, which were, for the most part, pathetic. Such selections as "The Great Lover," "Back to Methuselah" and Sorry, Wrong Number stimulated such passions as pity, fear and/or nostalgia instead of arousing intellectual concern for social or philosophical issues.

Moorehead's program was designed to entertain a middle brow audience. The broad emotional appeals inherent in her selections coupled with the blend of comic and serious selections made her program appropriate for an audience of various ages and levels of education. Most of her selections were written by respected authors whose bodies of works were well known to the general public, though specific examples performed in Moorehead's program may have been unfamiliar to her audience.

Moorehead's talent and her technical skills were admired by both critics and audiences. Moorehead was "every moment the consummate actress."²¹ Her ability to assume quickly and to differentiate distinctly a variety of characterizations within one selection, her vocal and physical variations and her innate sense of timing--especially for comic material--made Moorehead a natural performer. Furthermore,

Moorehead entertained her audiences without the aid of other performers and with only a minimal number of props. This feat led critic Ed Brooks to marvel that Moorehead succeeded in an art form where Cornelia Otis Skinner "with all her props . . . palls."²²

Moorehead's performance persona, which she displayed during the transitional scenes of her program, greatly contributed to her success. She projected a strong, dynamic stage presence which put her audience immediately at ease.²³ This presence, or personality, was a delightful, gracious woman totally concerned with her audience's comfort and enjoyment. It was a personality that contained many of the elements inherent in Moorehead's own personality devoid of any petty, negative elements that would have a derisive effect upon her audience and ultimately, upon their acceptance of her selections.

Moorehead, as performer, had the ability to make friends instantly with her audience.²⁴ Her performance personality gave truth to the theory that "one man shows have succeeded for one inescapable reason. In them the audience surrenders to the primal lure to the magnetic outsize [sic] star performer."²⁵ Moorehead made her audiences want to hear her selections because the performance persona that she presented made them want to be with her and hear what she had to say.

Endnotes

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⁵Eugene Bahn and Margaret L. Bahn, A History of Oral Interpretation, (Minneapolis, MN: Burgess Publishing Co., 1970), p. 162.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Charles Laughton, "Where Do We Go From Here," in The Agnes Moorehead Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI., Box 54, Folder 4, n.d., pp 1-passim.

⁸Ruth Draper, The Art of Ruth Draper: Her Dramas and Characters, with a Memoir by Morton Dauwen Label, London: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 5.

⁹G. Bruce Loganbill, Cornelia Otis Skinner and Her Art Form of Monologue-Drama, Ph. D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1961, pp. 30-32.

¹⁰John S. Gentile, "Early Examples of the Biographical One-Person Show Genre: Emlyn Williams as Charles Dickens and Hal Holbrook's Mark Twain Tonight!", Literature in Performance, 6 (November 1985),p. 46.

¹¹Ibid. p. 46.

¹²Gentile, "Biographical One-Person Show Genre," p. 48.

¹³Brooks Atkinson, "Good As New: Mark Twain is Still a Lively Performer," New York Times, 19 April 1959,

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¹⁴Lionel Crocker "Charles Laughton on Oral Reading," Central States Speech Journal, 3 (December 1951), p. 22.

¹⁵Wilma H. Grimes and Althea Smith Mattingly, Interpretation: Writer, Reader, Audience, (Bellemont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., [1961]), pp. 325-327; Sara Lowery and Gertrude E. Johnson, Intrepretative Reading: Techniques and Selections, Rev. ed., (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, Inc., 1953), pp. 243-246; Chloe Armstrong and Paul D. Brandes, The Oral Interpretation of Literature, (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., Inc., 1963), pp.47-51. This technique of programming was also advocated by Francine Merritt in her classes of interpretation at Louisiana State University.

¹⁶Constance Hereshoff, "Moorehead Show 'Fabulous' Success," San Diego (CA) Union, 30 April 1954, n.p.

¹⁷Helen Henry, "Reading by Miss Moorehead Thrills Filled Auditorium," Middlesboro (KY) Daily News, 13 April 1954, n.p.

¹⁸Virginia Shaw, "Agnes Moorehead Gives Fascinating Performance at Wharf on Same Bill with Fry's of 'Phoenix Too Frequent,'" unidentified newspaper clipping in Agnes Moorehead Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI., 28 July 1960, n.p.

¹⁹Claire Baker, "My Unforgettable Earful," The Call Board (Agnes Moorehead Fan Club Newsletter), Issue #6, in Agnes Moorehead collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI., May-June 1964, p.4.

²⁰Eric Atkins, "Memory, 'Pink' Charm Spark Moorehead Show," St. Petersburg (FL) Times, 4 December 1967, p. 9-D.

²¹"Agnes Moorehead Wows Audience in LSU Show," Baton Rouge (LA) State Times, 15 April 1954, n. p.

²²"Ed Brooks, "Miss Moorehead Delights Crowd," New Orleans Times-Picayune, 6 March 1954, n. p.

²³"Associate Actress with Drama Variety," Northern Illinois University Northern Star, 14 July 1961, n. p.

²⁴Louis Schaeffer, "Agnes Moorehead Gives an Enjoyable Solo Show," Brooklyn (NY) Eagle, 15 March 1954, p. 4.

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APPENDIX

A Synopsis of That Fabulous Redhead

(Spring Tour, 1954)

INTRODUCTION

The following synopsis of Moorehead's script for That Fabulous Redhead is based upon her original script housed in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison. All copyrighted materials Moorehead performed are omitted from this synopsis and are indicated by title and author only. The divisions into segments are mine. They are not in the original script. Also, the punctuation and spelling in the original has been corrected where necessary.

SCRIPT

SEGMENT ONE

(Enter and Bow. Go to Bench.)

Oh, I was going to read. (LOOK FOR BOOKS) Oh, my books. If you'll excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, I must go and get some books. (BRINGS BOOKS ON STAGE.) I have been instructed not to read anything out of old books, which is not useful to you today. I think it's very easy for a man and very difficult for a woman to know just how to begin. So, I thought it would be safe to read some household hints--some household hints down through the centuries. I found a recipe in a fourteenth century cookbook, which I thought perhaps you ladies would like to have when you're planning your menus for the day. It's written in the original Chaucerian English. It's a recipe for a dish called Cokyntrice.

SEGMENT TWO

(My Note: The first selection in the series of five brief selections is missing from the original script.)

(From medieval cookery to withers.) Here's a hint from

an eighteenth century book written for ladies who went in for horseback riding.

Ladies who ride astride on horseback may be glad to know of the following remedy--lay on the sore or bruised part a damp sod of earth, about two inches thick, mold side next to the horse.

Now I've found a nineteenth century book of household hints by no less a person than Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher whose sister-in-law, Harriet Beecher Stowe, wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin. Here's a hint on the care of marble statues.

Fine marbles should not be handled and are often yellowed by being washed improperly. Only pure cold water should be used, and a painter's brush employed to wash them.

If carefully dusted with a feather duster every day, marble statuary should not need washing more than twice a year. They need gauze covers in summer. If any insect gets to them, alcohol will be needed to remove the stain, but never use soap or warm water.

I know all your houses are full of Italian marble statues.

Here's a little something on How to Cure Canaries of Asthma.

Soak a piece of sponge cake in a teaspoon of whiskey and teaspoonful of water. Give the bird some of this twice a week. Keep it carefully from any cold draughts. Give the bird a bath of tepid water twice a week.

Any canaries should sing after that.

This is from an Edwardian book published in 1909. The book is called The Complete Hostess. I must say the business of calling cards has never been clear to me until I read this.

(My note: The last selection of segment one is also missing from the original script).

SEGMENT THREE

Well we have all sorts of conventions to put up with today but we don't have that to carry on--thank goodness. O dear, I am afraid I was never one for the social niceties even now I get mixed up about place cards. I like to dump my friends all down at my table and let them find their own place.

When I was a girl I was my mother's despair, I guess I was a bit of a tomboy. I would lie down full length on the wet grass on my stomach and drink deep from a spring (that was on my grandfather's farm in Ohio) and I'd go home with

the front of my dress all muddy. Have you ever drunk like that from a spring ice cold? I used to like to trace a design with my finger on a frosty window pane. I love living. Don't you love the wooly prickly feel of a tomato leaf and I love the smell of patent leather. Isn't that funny? And what could be finer than the fresh foamy smell of a clean man. Do you know the poem of Rupert Brooke about things like that? Winston Churchill said that these lines from the middle of it, (the poem is called The Great Lover) were some of the most lovely lines in the English language. Listen:

SEGMENT FOUR

A cutting from "The Great Lover" by Rupert Brooke.

SEGMENT FIVE

'The cool kindness of sheets that smooth away trouble' Isn't that nice. Don't you love the iron-y smell of clean sheets? You could always tell when my mother lived in a house by the fragrance of the linen. Even the kitchen smelled different. We used to call her Madame Pot Pourri. That was all in Ohio. I was actually born in Boston, but we lived a lot in Ohio, and I know and love Ohiofolk.

James Thurber comes from Ohio. I want to read you a piece from James Thurber's album about his mother. His mother, his father and his aunts are all the kind of people that I was brought up with. I guess that every family boasts of one or two strange characters but it seems to me that my own family had more than its usual share. There was an aunt of mine Aunt Cam we called her. . . .

the hat story and the actress story

(My note: Stories are missing in actual script.)

My father, who was a minister, roared with laughter. Now for James Thurber's mother. This has a lovely title 'Lavender with a Difference.'

SEGMENT SIX

Lavender with a Difference" by James Thurber

SEGMENT SEVEN

My father was very strict with me from a baby on about speaking good English. He read the Bible to us, of course, but I heard the dear old Bible stories from two sources--one from my father who read from the good book itself and the other from our coloured [sic] girl, our nurse, maid of all work who was called Daphne. Daphne was from the deep South.

Her people had been slaves. She gave our family so much warmth and love. Just heaped it on us. It's extraordinary how I have remembered almost word for word, I think, how Daphne used to tell them. O, before we go into Daphne's interpretation of the Bible there is a family story about her. [common law story.]

My mother was quite perturbed about Daphne going to so many weddings of her sister. There were at least, as far as I can remember, six times in one year when Daphne asked to attend her sister's wedding. My mother, being quite Victorian, was quite upset about the sister's many marriages and went into a long conference with my father about it. My father was a minister. My father said to my mother, "Well, Molly, if you are so curious I think it best to ask Daphne."

So my mother began to question Daphne, asking her. "Isn't this about the sixth time that your sister has had a wedding? I didn't think one could get divorced and married so many times and so quickly."

And my mother would say, "I'm quite worried about your sister."

To which Daphne replied, "Miz Moorehead, mah sister hasn't been married so many times-just about 3. But she common laws some."

To get back to the Bible here is how Daphne used to tell us the story of Moses in the Bullrush. Not bullrushes mind you - b-u-l-l-r-u-s-h.

SEGMENT EIGHT

She'd say, "I want to tell you a little story about Moses and the bullrush. A long time ago there was a bad old king and he had a mighty pretty lookin' daughter by the name of Miss Pharoah. Now Miss Pharoah had a lot of handmaidens who used to wait on her hand and foot buttin' all her buttons and tying her shoelaces, and combin' her hair and keepin' her neck clean. Miss Pharoah used to go down to the water everyday. Specially when it was hot. To dangle her toes and keep herself in the water and keep herself cool. And all the handmaidens would all sit around her, fannin' her and tellin' her how pretty she was.

One day when she was down there she heard a funny little cry and she said 'What's that?' And one of her handmaidens said 'I think it's over there in the bullrush.' So she said, 'You go wade out and see.'

Now this handmaiden didn't want to do that because there was all kinds of things in the water--such as crocodiles, frogs and slippery kind of things. But Miss Pharoah said, 'Go on. You wade out there and see what that was that was cryin'. And the handmaiden had to do what she told her. So she lifted her skirts up and waded out into the bullrush. She parted the bullrush and she said 'I found a basket.' Miss Pharoah said, 'Well, bring it here to me.' So the handmaiden picked up the basket and brought it to Miss

Pharoah. Now this was a funny basket. Cause on the outside of it was tar--all over the basket was tar. So Miss Pharoah didn't wanna dirty her hands none and she said, 'You open the basket.' Now they didn't know what was in the basket and they was kind of afraid to open it. But Miss Pharoah being Miss Pharoah the kings daughter they had to do what she told them. And so she opened it.

This was a great moment of suspense. Not only to us but to Daphne. "When the basket was opened, do you know what was inside that basket?" she said. "A little baby! A little pink baby boy!" Miss Pharoah said, 'Oh, what a sweet little thing!' And all the handmaidens crowded around and said, 'What a sweet little baby boy.'

Now you know at this time Miss Pharoah's father, old King Pharoah didn't want any babies in the land. He did away with every one of them. And so Miss Pharoah was mighty afraid that her father would find out about this baby and do some harm to it so she said to her handmaiden, 'What will we do?' And one of the handmaidens said, 'Well, why don't you keep the baby?' And another handmaiden said 'Why don't you hide the baby?' And Miss Pharoah said 'I'd like to have the baby and I think I'll array myself an' go see my father, the king.'

Now did she get around this . . . ?

You know your mind is absolutely blank until the time. . . She arrayed herself in her best silks and satins. She had rings on every finger--all kinds of bright shiny things in her hair and she sprinkled herself with hoyts--(that was the cheapest pungent perfume you could buy at that particular time when I was little) and she marched up to see the king.

The king was in a crap game. We'd say what is a crap game, she'd say, 'Shootin' dice--little white squares with dots on them--it was a game. The old king was shootin' dice with all his ambassadors and all his viceroys and he didn't have any time to see his daughter. When Miss Pharoah says, "Pappy, I want to ask you a question." He says, "Go along, go along, chile, can't you see I'm busy-with my ambassadors and viceroys. I'm losin' money." She waited there for a while and then she said, "Pappy, I gotta ask a question." He sayd, "All right, what is it, what is it, What do you want?"

She says, "Pappy, I come to ask a favor of you. I wants to have a baby."

And he sayd, "Go along, girl."

(My Note: This is how the story ends in the script; perhaps there are pages missing.)

SEGMENT NINE

Now I'd like to read you a story from the Bible itself, the King James Bible which isn't so much different. All the pictures and images in the story every time I read it always make me think of Daphne and how she used to tell us the old stories. It is the story of Noah's Ark.

SEGMENT TEN

The Story of the Flood from The Book of Genesis

SEGMENT ELEVEN

(Transition from flood story to Proust.)

Oof! My father used to read us that story so simply.

When you come to think of it there is a holy simplicity about Daphne's telling of the Pharoah story too. Well, so much for my childhood.

I always wanted to be a wicked woman. Don't laugh there isn't a woman in this theatre who hasn't wanted to be a femme fatale at one time another or a man worthy of the name who hasn't dreamt of being a gay seducer on a large scale. Well, I have been a wicked woman many times on the stage, on the radio and in the movies and it felt wonderful and it worked it out my system thank goodness. In my most lurid moments I've wanted to be a scarlet woman in an elegant carriage in the Bois de Boulogne at the turn of the century. I love Paris, what proper female wouldn't. In Paris once I was sent a mauve hat box and packed in mauve tissue paper was a bunch of Parma violets this size (I married the man) Mauve is my favorite colour--he knew it the best.

Here is a sketch from Marcel's Proust's 'Remembrance of Things Past' about just all that.

SEGMENT TWELVE

A cutting from Remembrance of Things Past by Marcel Proust

SEGMENT THIRTEEN

(Closing the first half.)

Oof! Do you know what the painter Whistler said about mauve? He said it was 'just pink trying to be purple'! Well, lets have an interval, shall we? Au Revoir!

ACT IISEGMENT FOURTEEN

Well what shall I do now? You know like everybody else I hate writing letters and I love getting them. Letters are hard to write because it is like giving a piece of yourself away and getting them is like being given a piece of somebody you are fond of.

You may know a person for years and one day you get your first letter from them and it will so often reveal them more intimately than any conversation ever has. I want to read

you a story of Ring Lardner's that I love. It is written in the form of letters which are revealing indeed. Before I do that, I am crazy on the subject of letters, here is a real letter written by Queen Elizabeth of England to a Bishop (Not the reigning Queen Elizabeth but the Elizabeth of Shakespeare's time).

SEGMENT FIFTEEN

Proud Prelate:

You know what you were before I made you what you are now. If you do not immediately comply with my request--I will unfrock you, by God.

Elizabeth

Quite a gal!

It might be interesting to note that the Bishop of Ely gave in.

Here is Ring Lardner's story "Some Like 'em Cold."

SEGMENT SIXTEEN

A cutting from "Some Like 'em Cold" by Ring Lardner

SEGMENT SEVENTEEN

Well maybe the lesson to be learnt from that is don't write letters for fear you give yourself away completely. I'd better be careful! Some people just won't write letters--some of your best friends. I can never get a letter out of Charles Laughton and I don't know anyone who has yet. Anyone. He'll talk your head off but write NO. BUT here is an intimate glimpse of him written by no less a person than Sir Osbert Sitwell who had a great house in Charles' hometown in England. Charles' people are hotel people you know.

SEGMENT EIGHTEEN

A cutting from The Scarlet Tree by Osbert Sitwell

SEGMENT NINETEEN

(Black Out)

STAGE MANAGER: (off stage) Miss Moorehead.

AGNES: I know, I know - be quiet. I'm telling about Charles. (Note: She continues her passage from The Scarlet Tree.)

STAGE MANAGER: (off stage) Miss Moorehead, Please!

AGNES: Be quiet, will you? I haven't finished about Charles yet. Leave me alone. (Continue passage.)

STAGE MANAGER: (enters with telephone which he places on table by love seat.)

AGNES: And what is that?

STAGE MANAGER: A telephone! (exits).

AGNES: Why am I always interrupted by telephones? What is it for?

STAGE MANAGER: (off stage) "Sorry, Wrong Number."

SEGMENT TWENTY

(Record in blackout up to this point. Then lights up.)

Moorehead performed a seventeen minute cutting of Sorry, Wrong Number by Lucille Fletcher.

SEGMENT TWENTY-ONE

Well, that's that. That will guarantee to rid your house of termites and unwelcome guests. Well, its about time to go home now, but I'd rather not leave you with all that noise and screeching.

I'm an artist and I'm very proud of it. I know how it feels being proud of being an artist but I could never put it into words. It is just something warm and very large inside of me.

When I was touring around in Don Juan In Hell, Charley Boyer had some lines of Bernard Shaw's which made me think. Shaw was talking about the artist, he said:

"His paintings taught me to see better--his music to hear better--and his poems to feel more deeply." Beautiful, isn't it?

And then afterwards, I found in his long, long play Back to Methuselah another speech on the subject of the artist. It is spoken by mother Eve.

It is after the garden of Eden when she has lived 300 years. She is irritated by Adam who has been talking of nothing but digging in the ground and by her son Cain who has been talking of nothing but killing. The speech goes like this.

SEGMENT TWENTY-TWO

A reading from a cutting of

Back to Methuselah by George Bernard Shaw

Act I

In the Beginning : B. C. 4004
(In the Garden of Eden.)

SEGMENT TWENTY-THREE

Good night, good gentlemen and sweet ladies, sleep well.
(Moorehead exits.)

ENCORE

(After applause has died.)

My husband and I have a little son. His name is Sean.
I read this poem "The Harp Weaver" to him one day--and after
I read it to you I'll tell you what he said.
A reading of "The Harp Weaver" by Edna St. Vincent Millay.

My little boy waited a few minutes. Then, with the honesty
that is somewhat frightening, said -

"It is very sad--but I like it

Another momentous pause:

"Did the clothes really fit him, Mother?"

VITA

Leon Perkins was born in Houston, Texas. He was graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Speech from Southwest Texas State University in 1971. He returned to Southwest Texas State after four years in the United States Air Force and was graduated with an Master of Arts in Speech in 1977. He began his graduate studies for the doctorate in 1977 at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. He lives in Baton Rouge and is employed by the United States Postal Service.


DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT


Candidate: Orville Leon Perkins

Major Field: Speech

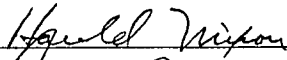
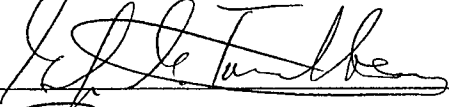
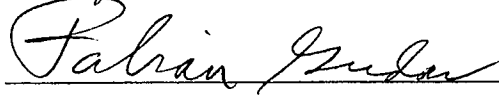
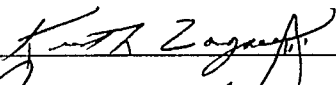

Title of Dissertation: THE PUBLIC READING CAREER OF AGNES MOOREHEAD: AN INVESTIGATION
OF HER THEORY AND PRACTICE

Approved:


Major Professor and Chairman


Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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